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PRAYER AND THE BIBLE

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Augustine Mulloor

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Prayer and the Bible

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Editorial

Prayer is the perfect expression of religion. Sacrifice is prayer par excellence. But prayer is probably the most misunderstood religious theme today. The crisis in the understanding of prayer results from the misinterpretation of religion itself. Religion, having become a commercial product to many people to-day, used for exploitative and profit-oriented purposes, has become basically irreligious. Accordingly, prayer which is the best expression of religion has also become a means for the people to find a cover up for their own selfish targets. Hypocrisy, one may call it, to use a traditional catch-phrase. Jesus made a stark criticism of the hypocritical religious attitudes of pharisees and scribes of his time (Mt 23:13-26). They had missed "the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith for the sake of unimportant, silly and useless ceremonial and ritualistic perfections (Mt 23:23). They had recourse to "long prayers as a pretence" while "devouring the houses of widows" (Mk 12:38-40).

Authentic prayer takes a person out of himself/herself. Prayer results in self-transcendence when it is authentic. It articulates one's actual situation and transcends that situation. That is how prayer becomes transformation.

Bible is basically a prayer tradition. The whole Bible can be interpreted from the point of view of prayer because it is a history from the perspective of God. Every moment of the Bible history is an encounter between God and human beings.

In this issue, we shall make a search for a few models of prayer from the Bible, from the Book of Job, from the Book of Prophets, from the Gospels and from Paul with the intention of identifying the dynamism of authentic prayer.

In Job we have a human being confronting God in the context of unjust suffering. In this context whatever he says and does emerges

from his deep faith in God. He challenges God and at the same time he submits himself to God. He demands an explanation from God and at the same time he keeps his hand over his mouth and becomes utterly silent. This is authentic prayer.

A prophet is the porter and giver of the word of God. Hence his identity is essentially connected with prayer relationship. It is by being a person of God that the prophet is able to receive the word of God into his life, allowing it to be eaten and digested (Ezekiel), to become fire within his bones which cannot be controlled (Jeremiah), letting it touch his lips and cleanse with its burning power (Isaiah). Being a person of prayer the prophet is able to interpret the historical situation from God's point of view.

Prayer in the Gospels is seen from the angle of communication. Jesus' prayer not only revealed a content but also was a means of effective communication, communication between God and himself, himself and his disciples, himself and his people etc. This is the most effective means of communication.

Prayer in Paul is the result of his experience of the risen Jesus that transformed his life radically. Essentially it is praising God for the mystery of salvation revealed in the Christ-event, it is letting the Spirit speak, the Spirit who is the very foundation of christian existence - life in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit etc.

Two models of prayer in Mt 26:36-46 and Psalm 8 are presented at the end. Thanks to our contributors, we could bring out this issue. We hope it will provide a basis for prayer which is a commonly used medium to come out of hypocrisy and mediocrity.

Augustine Mulloor

Confrontation with God: Prayer in Job

Paddy Meagher

Book of Job can be read from various angles. It can be read as prayer too. Then it is the confrontation with God by Job, a just man suffering unjustly. That confrontation has the beautiful background of the phenomena of the universe of which the full control is in the hands of God. Hence the meeting of God and Job ultimately leads to the experience of God in the darkness of faith for Job and his realization that he is just dust and ashes. He moves from hearing God to seeing Him. Thus prayer in its authenticity is both challenging and confronting God in sincerity and shutting one's mouth in humility.

We shall begin our reflection with a question. With which Job are you genuinely comfortable? There is the exemplary, God fearing, submissive Job who prays in the midst of terrible calamities and anguish. He said,

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” [1:21]

In reply to his wife's sarcastic taunt

“Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die”
he said to her,

“You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” [2:9-10]

The writer underlines the persistent integrity of the man whom he had initially described as blameless and upright, “one who feared God and turned away from evil” [1:1] with his comments after the initial calamities and the more personal calamity. He observes that “*In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing*” [1:22] and again “*In*

all this Job did not sin with his lips " [2:9]. Though there is no question at any time of Job sinning with his lips, in no way can we claim that he did not charge God with wrongdoing.

There is also the desperate, resentful, sarcastic, angry, complaining and insulting Job of the dialogues who abuses his friends, obstinately affirms his innocence and abuses God in no uncertain manner. This is the Job whom his friends sharply criticize. A fine example of this is Eliphaz's retort:

But you are doing away with the fear of God, and hindering meditation before God. For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you. "Are you the firstborn of the human race? Were you brought forth before the hills? Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not clear to us? The gray-haired and the aged are on our side, those older than your father. Are the consolations of God too small for you, or the word that deals gently with you? Why does your heart carry you away, and why do your eyes flash, so that you turn your spirit against God, and let such words go out of your mouth? [15:4-13]

Having been consistently challenged and abused, God speaks of him in a quite ambiguous way with pointed reproofs

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? [38:2]

and

"Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must' respond" [40:2].

Finally in the final narrative epilogue God offers an unqualified approbation which startles readers as they listen to the stringent rebuke to the friends and God's judgment of their role in the dialogue as contrasted with Job,

you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" [42:7.8]

Maybe to be fair we need to include a third Job, the one praised by God not only at the outset of the narrative and during and after the

tragedies but also at the end of the dialogues in the narrative epilogue. Praising him before Satan God initially says of Job:

“Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.” [1:8]

and again after the first series of great tragedies

“Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and, upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason”. [2:3].

God’s final judgment is expressed in the words to Eliphaz already quoted:

“My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” [42:7]

This leads us to enquire which Job do we really need in our prayer life. In one of his studies of wisdom literature Roland Murphy turns to Soren Kierkegaard for a reply to this and the initial question we posed:

Job! Job! Job! Didst thou indeed utter nothing but these beautiful words, “The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord”? Didst thou say nothing more? ... No, thou who in the ripeness of the days wast a sword for the oppressed, a cudgel to protect the old, a staff for the decrepit, thou didst not fail men who all were riven asunder - then thou wast a mouth for the afflicted, and a cry for the contrite, and a shriek for the anguished, and an assuagement for all who were rendered dumb by torments, a faithful witness to the distress and grief, a heart can harbor, a trustworthy advocate who dared to complain “in anguish of spirit” and to contend with God. Why do people conceal this?... Does one perhaps not dare to complain before God? ... Thee I have need of, a man, who know how to complain aloud, so that his complaint echoes in heaven where God confers with Satan in devising schemes against a man.¹

1 Roland E. Murphy in *Job the Steadfast* in *The Tree of Life. An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, Doubleday, New York, 1990, pp 38-39.

This comment leads us to study the relationship of Job to God in the dialogues from the point of view of prayer. We will consider the relationship to God which comes to expression in the ways Job talks about God, his direct addresses to God and some comments by his friends. Initially a brief introduction to the content of the book may be useful.²

As all know the book has a narrative prologue and epilogue [1: 1 - 2:13 and 42:7-17] and the long poetic dialogical section [3:1-42:6]. In this long poetic part there are the two full cycles of arguments presented by Job and his three friends [3-14 and 15-21] and the truncated cycle with the brief contribution of Bilbad and no further word from Zophar [22-31] with the apparently unattached poetic hymn in praise of the incomparable mystery of the whereabouts of wisdom [28]. The Job's speeches in this section are causes of a lot of discussion because of the uncharacteristic content and the three indications of Job speaking [26: 1; 27:1 and 29:1]. The drastic final step of Job challenging God and issuing a series of oaths [Chs 31] is left hanging while the young and pretentious Elihu severely critiques the friends, Job and echoes the words of God which are to follow [32-37]. Ultimately the God who has been the centre of the bitter debate addresses Job directly, bypassing in a strange way all that Job has said and overwhelms him with a sense of his sovereign wisdom and power while Job meekly responds to each speech [38:1-40:2, and 40:6-41:34] and surrenders [41:3-5 and 42:1-6].

I work with the presupposition that the whole book of Job is the creation of the religious imagination of a number of great thinkers grappling with some fundamental religious questions. These concern

2 I have looked at passages in various books on Job which have in some ways influenced comments and decisions about the meaning of texts. I shall list the works here and only refer explicitly when I have made major use of a writer. G. Gutierrez, *On Job God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 1987; N.C Habel, *The Book of Job A Commentary*, London, SCM, 1985; R.E. Murphy, *O.Carm, The Book of Job. A Short Reading*, New York, Paulist Press, 1999; C.A Newsom, *The Book of Job, Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, in *New interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IV, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1996; M.H. Pope, *Job, Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, New York, Doubleday & Company, 1965. I have also paid attention to the notes in *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1993 and a chapter in a doctoral thesis being written by Irudayaraj, M.

the relationship of God to human suffering, human understanding of suffering and prosperity and ultimately whether persons can serve God motivated by genuine devotion without any hope of reward. Aware of the many problems with the Hebrew textual tradition and the inadequacies of all translations, and the problems regarding the process of composition, the relationship of the narrative prologue and epilogue to the poetic dialogues I will not enter into these problems. Though I use the term “dialogues” I am aware of the fact that Job and his friends do not really dialogue with each other as they often fail to come to grips with each other on a point and argue it through. However Job does sarcastically scorn Zophar’s claim that the wicked are punished, arguing forcefully that the wicked not only are not punished but sin with impunity and are most successful. He goes to the extent of claiming that the moral state of the world should shame God (Chs 20-21b and 24).

The desire for Death

We enter the dialogues confronted with a deeply moving lament by Job, which sets the mood of these anguished and angry interchanges. He will move beyond this enervating attitude to a more vigorous defence of his innocence and a growing strident demand that God justify his punishment of Job. The mood shifts and the interweaving of moods is fascinating in the book. The writer tells us that Job “cursed the day of his birth”. We need to listen to him to prepare ourselves to hear his struggle with God. As the whole dialogical part is poetic we need to pay attention to types of parallelism of lines, the imagery and the writer’s rhetorical skill and style.

“Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man-child is conceived.’ Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, or light shine on it. Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds settle upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.[3:3-5]

“Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Why were there knees to receive me, or breasts for me to suck? Now I would be lying down and quiet; I would be asleep; then I would be at rest [3:11-13]

Or why was I not buried like a stillborn child, like an infant that never sees the light? There the wicked cease from troubling, and

there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners are at ease together; they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster. "Why is light given to one in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures; Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in? [3:16-18.20-21.23].

The last remarks about his situation "whom God has fenced in" could be a starting point for the interactions of Job with his God. We could write much about the relationship or we could comment on texts so that the reader continuously is in contact with the actual text and experiences the interaction for herself or himself. We have chosen the second approach.

The Gradual approach to God

Job's intense pain leads initially to a more restrained plea. Outlining the intensity of his suffering he pleads with God indirectly:

"O that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words have been rash. For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me. "O that I might have my request, and that God would grant my desire; that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off! This would be my consolation; I would even exult in unrelenting pain; for I have not denied the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should wait? And what is my end, that I should be patient? Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze? In truth I have no help in me, and any resource is driven from me. [6:2-4.8-13]

However the lack of sympathy of his friends whom he accuses so intensely and his constant pain leads him to a more accusing tone. We listen to his graphic condemnation of his friends' treachery

"Those who withhold kindness from a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty. My companions are treacherous like a torrent-bed, like freshets that pass away, that run dark with ice, turbid with melting snow. In time of heat they disappear; when it is hot, they vanish from their place. Such you have now become to me; you see my calamity, and are afraid" [6:14-21]

and to his description of the pain which provides the background for his attack on his God.

“Do not human beings have a hard service on earth, and are not their days like the days of a laborer? Like a slave who longs for the shadow, and like laborers who look for their wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. ‘When I lie down I say,’ ‘When shall I rise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn. My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out again. My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and come to their end without hope.” [7:1-6]

He now addresses God directly, a prayer of a man racked by pain, the cry of one who voices the anguish of his spirit and the bitterness of his soul. Aware of the utter brevity of his life, a mere breath or passing cloud he is willing to pour out his bitterness.

“Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good. The eye that beholds me will see me no more; while your eyes are upon me, I shall be gone. As the cloud fades and vanishes, so those who go down to Sheol do not come up; they return no more to their houses, nor do their places know them any more.” Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

He pictures God as a persistent tormentor, an oppressive supervisor who never leaves human beings in peace, never pardons sins and therefore continually pursues Job with suffering. The prayer of lament reaches unusual heights at this point. There a strange type of personal engagement with God, a type of ruthless honesty about his experience of God. The prayer sounds genuine and realistic if bold.

Am I the Sea, or the Dragon, that you set a guard over me? When I say, ‘My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint’, then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I would choose strangling and death rather than this body. I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, for my days are a breath. What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, visit them every morning, test them every

moment? Will you not look away from me for a while, let me alone until I swallow my spittle? If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity? Why have you made me your target? Why have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be." [7:7-21]

The First Great Summons to God

Job wants to call God to account, a desire which becomes a desperate pursuit because only God is responsible for his suffering and he sees no adequate personal guilt to account for such a state. We listen to Job as he voices his frustration and his sense of futility as he desires to call God to account to explain his sufferings. Bildad has affirmed the integrity of God with his rhetorical questions: *Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?* [8:3] and assures Job that God will restore him were he to repent.

If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression. If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place [8:4-6].

However, Job apparently agreeing, actually sees the reality in a very different way. We will observe that he initially speaks about God and gradually there is a shift as he speaks directly to God in ways which must anger his friends. We will comment on a long text [9:1-10:22]. The various descriptions of God are fascinating and the growing boldness or rashness of Job astounding.

Then Job answered: "Indeed I know that this is so; but how can a mortal be just before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand [9:2-3].

The following eulogy of God's immense creative might equals God's own self description when he deigns to respond and the great hymn to the mystery of the creator's wisdom [Ch.28].

He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength - who has resisted him, and succeeded? - he who removes mountains, and they do not know it, when he overturns them in his anger; who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; who commands

the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea; who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south; who does great things beyond understanding, and marvelous things without number [9:4-10].

Not only is God majestic in power he is also utterly invisible and unaccountable to anyone

Look, he passes by me, and I do not see him; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. He snatches away; who can stop him? Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?' "God will not turn back his anger; the helpers of Rahab bowed beneath him."

The deep conviction of his own innocence leads Job to underline his sense of futility, wanting to call God to account and contend with him in his situation of great and inexplicable suffering. We note that the imaginary scene is of a courtroom and God is his accuser. We also draw attention to the repetition of "if I..." and some expression of utter futility and helplessness.

How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. If I summoned him and he answered me, I do not believe that he would listen to my voice. For he crushes me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause; he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness. If it is a contest of strength, he is the strong one! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. I am blameless; I do not know myself; I loathe my life [9:14-21].

Job becomes even more bold accusing God of not only mocking the innocent in their suffering but actually supporting the wicked.

It is all one; therefore I say, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked. 23 When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the eyes of its judges - if it is not he, who then is it? [9:22-24]

Aware of the utter brevity of his life, Job considers putting aside his desire to bring God to account. However, he realizes he cannot escape

God's condemnation. His complaint about God now becomes a prayerful lament addressed directly to God whom he addresses as "you" and his sense of futile helplessness grows as God will rudely destroy any attempt to be pleasing to him.

"My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away, they see no good. They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey. If I say, 'I will forget my complaint; I will put off my sad countenance and be of good cheer', I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent. I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain? 30 If I wash myself with soap and cleanse my hands with lye, yet you will plunge me into filth, and my own clothes will abhor me [9:25-31].

He is so vividly aware of the inequality of the contest. But confident of his own innocence Job desires so eagerly to "speak without fear" and yet will such a God allow this? Can there be an arbiter between them? He knows that "no" is the answer to both desires. His experience of God is of one who terrifies.

For he is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no umpire between us, who might lay his hand on us both. If he would take his rod away from me, and not let dread of him terrify me, then I would speak without fear of him, for I know I am not what I am thought to be. [9:1-35]

Job continues to address God directly - a daring prayer rising from profound bitterness. He bombards God with ironical and bold questions, suggesting motives for God to change his behaviour. The creature mocks his creator. The writer wants us to listen carefully to the series of complaints framed as rhetorical questions.

I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the schemes of the wicked? Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as humans see? Are your days like the days of mortals, or your years like human years, that you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin, although you know that I am not guilty, and there is no one to deliver me out of your hand? Your hands

fashioned and made me; and now you turn and destroy me. Remember that you fashioned me like clay; and will you turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit. Yet these things you hid in your heart; I know that this was your purpose [10: I-13].

Though his bitterness seems to give way to a more grateful acknowledgement of God's goodness yet all this remains hidden and God is really "the watcher of humanity" [7:20]. Job compares him in his aggressive behavior to a lion, an implacable accuser and an invading general. He concludes his lament with a futile plea that he at least leave him alone.

If I sin, you watch me, and do not acquit me of my iniquity. If I am wicked, woe to me! If I am righteous, I cannot lift up my head, for I am filled with disgrace and look upon my affliction. Bold as a lion you hunt me; you repeat your exploits against me. You renew your witnesses against me, and increase your vexation toward me; you bring fresh troops against me. "Why did you bring me forth from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me, and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave. Are not the days of my life few? Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort before I go, never to return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness, the land of gloom and chaos, where light is like darkness." [10:14-22].

An Interlude - Divine Sovereignty

There is an interlude as it were before Job pursues his court case with God. He mocks his friends' pretense to be the guardians of wisdom and develops the idea of God's universal and unchallenged sovereignty over all reality. This is the God who alone is responsible for Job's situation in which he experiences himself a laughingstock though blameless and just. The hymn of praise of the creator and sovereign is rather beautiful and we will just cite some parts of it.

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; 8 ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. 9 Who

among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? [Job's suffering]. In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being. ... "With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding. If he tears down, no one can rebuild; if he shuts someone in, no one can open up. If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land... . He leads counselors away stripped, and makes fools of judges. He looses the sash of kings, and binds a waistcloth on their loins. He leads priests away stripped, and overthrows the mighty..... He pours contempt on princes, and looses the belt of the strong. He uncovers the deeps out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light. He makes nations great, then destroys them; he enlarges nations, then leads them away. 24 He strips understanding from the leaders of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless waste. [12:7-24]

Return to the Court

Having given proof of his own wisdom he turns to his friends with scorn and emphasizes that unlike them he will confront God saying:

"Look, my eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it. What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you. But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God [13:1-3].

Before he re-enters the court to accuse and argue with God he turns to his friends in a detailed attack and anticipates God's final single line condemnation of these traditional spiritual advisors.

As for you, you whitewash with lies; all of you are worthless physicians. If you would only keep silent, that would be your wisdom! Hear now my reasoning, and listen to the pleadings of my lips.⁷ Will you speak falsely for God, and speak deceitfully for him? Will you show partiality toward him, will you plead the case for God? Will it be well with you when he searches you out? Or can you deceive him, as one person deceives another? He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality. Will not his majesty terrify you, and the dread of him fall upon you? Your maxims are proverbs of ashes, your defenses are defenses of clay [13: 4-12].

Job now launches consciously into a dangerously daring confrontation with God challenging him to allow him to put his case. There is a strong irony in the fact that Job's very desire to come into God's presence is a proof of his innocence as the godless would never dare to come face to face with God.

"Let me have silence, and I will speak, and let come on me what may. I will take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand. See, he will kill me; I have no hope; but I will defend my ways to his face. This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him. Listen carefully to my words, and let my declaration be in your ears. I have indeed prepared my case; I know that I shall be vindicated. Who is there that will contend with me? For then I would be silent and die. Only grant two things to me, then I will not hide myself from your face: withdraw your hand far from me, and do not let dread of you terrify me. Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and you reply to me [13:13-22].

He continues the prolonged and ironically taunting address to God who accuses him even of old sins and makes so much mere mortals. Does he agree with Eliphaz whose idea is quoted below that no human being can be sinless before God? [15:14-16]

How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy? Will you frighten a windblown leaf and pursue dry chaff? For you write bitter things against me, and make me reap the iniquities of my youth. You put my feet in the stocks, and watch all my paths; you set a bound to the soles of my feet. One wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten.

"A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last. Do you fix your eyes on such a one? Do you bring me into judgment with you? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one can. Since their days are determined, and the number of their months is known to you, and you have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass, look away from them, and desist, that they may enjoy, like laborers, their days [13:23- 14:6].

A sense of greater hopelessness overwhelms Job as he pleads with God to relent and "look away" aware that though there is hope for a tree cut down, there is no hope for humans, destined to everlasting death.

"For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant. But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they? As waters fail from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up, so mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep [14:7-12].

Finally he dreams, a futile dream born of desperation and pain, of some type of afterlife, of some final hope, an end to God's relentless pursuit and oppressive presence. But the hope is shattered by the simple fact that death is the end and God leaves human beings with no hope. The picture of God is quite terrifying.

Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If mortals die, will they live again? All the days of my service I would wait until my release should come. You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands. For then you would not number my steps, you would not keep watch over my sin; my transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity.

"But the mountain falls and crumbles away, and the rock is removed from its place; the waters wear away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil of the earth; so you destroy the hope of mortals. You prevail forever against them, and they pass away; you change their countenance, and send them away. Their children come to honor, and they do not know it; they are brought low, and it goes unnoticed. They feel only the pain of their own bodies, and mourn only for themselves." [14:13-22].

In each of these laments in which Job speaks about God or addresses him directly and personally the image of God which emerges is persistently not just unattractive but harsh, brutal, insensitive and

unaccountably powerful. Eliphaz is scandalized and re-iterates his charges that Job is a great sinner.

But you are doing away with the fear of God, and hindering meditation before God. For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you

Why does your heart carry you away, and why do your eyes flash, so that you turn your spirit against God, and let such words go out of your mouth? What are mortals, that they can be clean? Or those born of woman, that they can be righteous? God puts no trust even in his holy ones, and the heavens are not clean in his sight; how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, one who drinks iniquity like water! [15:4-6.12-16].

The undaunted Job

Undaunted Job heightens the tone of his attack on God, whom he describes as merciless and vicious in dealing with him. We cannot but enjoy the beauty of the poetry and rhetorical skill of the writer however savage be Job's accusations against God. A strange way indeed to talk about God!. Did God hear these words? How to account for his final judgment that Job has spoken rightly of God? Again we need to be exposed to the full text and the shifts in mood.

"If I speak, my pain is not assuaged, and if I forbear, how much of it leaves me? Surely now God has worn me out; he has made desolate all my company. And he has shriveled me up, which is a witness against me; my leanness has risen up against me, and it testifies to my face. He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me; he has gnashed his teeth at me; my adversary sharpens his eyes against me. They have gaped at me with their mouths; they have struck me insolently on the cheek; they mass themselves together against me. God gives me up to the ungodly, and casts me into the hands of the wicked. I was at ease, and he broke me in two; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as his target; his archers surround me. He slashes open my kidneys, and shows no mercy; he pours out my gall on the ground. He bursts upon me again and again; he rushes at me like a warrior.

Job's response is an intense prayer, clothed in sackcloth accompanied by continuous tears. What is shocking is that he turns back on God the

cry of innocent victims whose blood cries out for vindication. Though all his friends have abandoned him, Job envisages that there is a witness who will act for him before God. It is not clear who this is since earlier he denied the possibility of an arbitrator [9:33].

I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and have laid my strength in the dust. My face is red with weeping, and deep darkness is on my eyelids, though there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure. "O earth, do not cover my blood; let my outcry find no resting place. Even now, in fact, my witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high. My friends scorn me; my eye pours out tears to God, that he would maintain the right of a mortal with God, as one does for a neighbor. For when a few years have come, I shall go the way from which I shall not return [16:6-22].

Ignoring Bildad's confident belief that the wicked are punished, Job returns to his description of God's merciless ways even turning his whole family against him. There seems to be no let up to his anger and complaints against God who pursues, attacks and seeks to destroy him like a military general in pursuit of an enemy.

Know then that God has put me in the wrong, and closed his net around me. Even when I cry out, 'Violence!' I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice. 8 He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths. He has stripped my glory from me, and taken the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone, he has uprooted my hope like a tree. He has kindled his wrath against me, and counts me as his adversary. His troops come on together; they have thrown up siegeworks against me, and encamp around my tent. "He has put my family far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. My relatives and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my serving girls count me as a stranger; I have become an alien in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer; I must myself plead with him. My breath is repulsive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own family. Even young children despise me; when I rise, they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. My bones

cling to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth [19:6-20].

In the midst of this impossible situation for the third time Job conjures up a hope for a helper. Earlier he had wished that there were an arbitrator to ensure fairness in the uneven trial [9:33]. Later to accompany the cry of his blood for justice he confidently believed that there was a witness who would take his stand before God and testify to his innocence [16:18-19]. Now he affirms that he has a go'el figure, loyal and sympathetic who at least after his death would ensure his vindication. Not only will this defense advocate vindicate him but also the indestructible record of his complaints, his charges and his proofs of his innocence engraved in rock³.

“O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed [19: 25-26a].

As the text is so disputed we add the translations of Newsom and Habel: I know that my defender lives, and that at the last he will arise upon the earth- after my skin has been stripped off!

and

Oh, if only my case were recorded! Oh, if only it were inscribed on a stela with iron stylus and led, carved on rock forever. I, I know that my redeemer lives and afterward he will rise on the dust - after, that is, my skin is peeled off.

However Job returns to his inextinguishable desire to appear before God face to face and have the satisfaction of experiencing vindication. The desire is wrapped in trepidation. The text is again very problematic and I give other translation as above.

... then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me! [19:26b-27].

3 This is a very problematic text. Scholars differ greatly about the identity of the person, some identifying the figure with God and about the time of his defence, before or after death. Christian tradition has read the text with a capital Redeemer and with reference to the resurrection. Also 19:25-27 is read as a single unit. I follow the main line of thought of Newsom,[Job, 478-9] and Habel [The Book of Job, 290-91.303-08]

But I would see God from my flesh whom I would see for myself,
my eyes would see and not a stranger

And

But from my flesh I would behold Eloah; 1, I would behold him.
My eyes would see him not another's - My heavens in my breast.

Though both Bildad [Ch 18] and Zophar [20] insist that God punishes the wicked and blesses the righteous, Job scorns their belief showing how the wicked prosper [21]. Eliphaz renews his attack on Job, *Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquity* [22:5] and spells out a whole series of his sins of gross social injustice [22:6-9]. His final suggestion rides in the face of all the Job has attempted by calling God to court to justify the punishments he has meted out on a just person. He urges Job to surrender and repent.

“Agree with God, and be at peace; in this way good will come to you. 22 Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. 23 If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored, if you remove unrighteousness from your tents [22:21-23].

A Further Attempt to Summon God

We are given the impression that some days have passed when Job again speaks: *Today also my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy despite my groaning* [23:2]. He seems to be compulsively intent to drag God into court to convince him of his righteousness. Despite his experience he believes that ultimately God will be a just and trustworthy judge. However his relentless search for God is fruitless as he cannot counter God who evades and hides. His is a horrible experience of God, which again ends with a desire to escape into oblivion. We listen to his final description of his search, his hopes and his utter disappointment. Job speaks about God. He begins with his yearning to come into God's presence and present his case, confident that finally he would find a just hearing.

Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling! I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; but he would give heed to me. There an upright person could reason with him, and I should be acquitted forever by my judge [23:3-7].

His mood swings since he is overcome with the hopelessness of the search though there is that glimmer of hope as God does observe his righteous way of life and could vindicate him.

"If I go forward [East], he is not there; or backward [West], I cannot perceive him; on the left [North] he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right [South], but I cannot see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth [23:8-12].

Reality dashes these dreams. God is unapproachable, impervious to any pressure and does just what he alone wants. Job is overwhelmed with a sense of horrible dread and a desire to escape so that he is untouchable. A reader shudders as he or she shares Job's experience.

But he stands alone and who can dissuade him? What he desires, that he does. For he will complete what he appoints for me; and many such things are in his mind. Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; If only I could vanish in darkness, and thick darkness would cover my face! [23:13-17]

Though terrified by the Almighty, he underlines the moral chaos of his times and God's apparent indifference. He places before his friends 'a grim panorama of wretchedness' of the most vulnerable groups in Israel's social world, the orphan, widow and indigent [24:2-12]⁴ He says: *The wicked remove landmarks; they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the donkey of the orphan; they take the widow's ox for a pledge. ... 'There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast, and take as a pledge the infant of the poor'* [24:2-3.9]. He also paints a picture of criminality which would be recognized by police in a modern city [24:13-17]. His opening and closing accusations touch on God's governance. He remarks

4 Newsom's phrase who comments: In the moral world of ancient Israel, treatment of the orphan and the widow (24:3) was the most fundamental measure of a society's moral status.

“Why are times not kept by the Almighty, and why do those who know him never see his days? 12 From the city the dying groan, and the throat of the wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer.” [24:1.12]

The Final Attempt to be Vindicated

The final section of Ch.24 [24:18-25] is problematic and there is quite a lot of discussion about the identity of speakers in the following chapters. Following Habel we accept 26:1-4; 27:1-12 as parts of Job's speeches prior to his final public defense in 29-31⁵. Brushing aside the counselor of his friends [26:1 -4] Job makes a passionate re-affirmation of his innocence and calls down God's curses on his enemies [27:1-6.7-12]. We listen to his solemn oath of integrity:

“As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. Far be it from me to say that you are right; until I die I will not put away my integrity from me. I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.” [27:2-6]

There are few references to God in his great public speech of defense [29-31] yet they are significant. We shall only briefly comment on these chapters. With poignant vividness, pining to be restored to his former state of life, he places his past greatness along side of and in contrast to his present miserable state. Job had been the most outstanding figure of his age, respected and revered, a model of justice and in some ways divine in his stature, power and goodness. Now even the riff raff of society scorn and mock him. The poet uses wonderful turns of phrase to describe this group: *But now they make sport of me, those who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock* [30:1]. He is aware of God's benevolent presence during his former life and knows he is responsible for the present intolerable suffering. He acknowledges that the past was the period *when the friendship of God was upon my tent; when the Almighty was still with me* [29:4-5]. The reason for his present predicament is *Because God*

5 Habel, *The Book of Job*, 351-401.

has loosed my bowstring and humbled me [30:11]. However he will not leave it at that but drags God in again, blaming him,

With violence he seizes my garment; he grasps me by the collar of my tunic. He has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes [30:18].

and then directly accusing him, a chilling picture of a brutally insensitive God whose behavior does not even match Job's when others cried to him for help.

I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me. You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me. You lift me up on the wind, you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm. I know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living "Surely one does not turn against the needy, when in disaster they cry for help. Did I not weep for those whose day was hard? Was not my soul grieved for the poor? But when I looked for good, evil came; and when I waited for light, darkness came [30:18-26].

Finally, searching for some way to break through to God clouded in total silence and completely hidden Job attempts to bridge this distance by making a public defense statement in the form of a detailed indictment of himself since his adversary chooses to remain totally elusive and uninvolved in the case. He uses a lengthy and solemn confessional statement of innocence describing a series of sins and the consequent punishments they deserve in a conditional form - if... then... Job is speaking to an ever silent God, knowing that the answer to his rhetorical question *Does he not see my ways, and number all my steps?* [31:4] is a definite "yes". He has not retreated a centimetre from his conviction of innocence. I would like to quote the whole agonized statement of innocence yet I will choose some aspects.

"If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hurried to deceit - 6 let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity! -

"If my heart has been enticed by a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door; 10 then let my wife grind for another, and let other men kneel over her. For that would be a heinous crime; that would be a criminal offense; for that would be a fire

consuming down to Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my harvest.

“If I have rejected the cause of my male or female slaves, when they brought a complaint against me; 14 what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? And did not one fashion us in the womb?

“If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the orphan has not eaten from it - for from my youth I reared the orphan like a father, and from my mother’s womb I guided the widow -

if I have raised my hand against the orphan, because I saw I had supporters at the gate; then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket. For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.

“If I have made gold my trust, or called fine gold my confidence; if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, or because my hand had gotten much;

if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand; 28 this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I should have been false to God above.

“If I have rejoiced at the ruin of those who hated me, or exulted when evil overtook them - I have not let my mouth sin by asking for their lives with a curse -

if I have concealed my transgressions as others do, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom, because I stood in great fear of the multitude, and the contempt of families terrified me, so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors -

“If my land has cried out against me, and its furrows have wept together; if I have eaten its yield without payment, and caused the death of its owners; 40 let thorns grow instead of wheat, and foul weeds instead of barley.” [31:5. 9-18. 21-30. 33-34. 38-39]

It is important to note the solemn re-affirmation of innocence because with this confession the writer says: "The words of Job are ended." Before completing his statement Job reiterates that bold desire which has marked all his speeches to God to appear and answer him even were God himself to write the indictment. We are amazed at his daring, willing proudly to display the charge sheet and courageously and confidently enter into God's presence to answer his charges. He says:

Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! let the Almighty answer me!) Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder; I would bind it on me like a crown; I would give him an account of all my steps; like a prince I would approach him.[31:35-37]

We shall bypass the speeches of the pretentious and youthful Elihu and turn them to theophany and climax of the book. Job has finished. When we look back we note the various ways he has pictured God. Though the covenant name of God is used, the God of the book is the creator. We would like to see God as the wise, powerful, provident source of life. He would like to hear of God as defender, friend, advocate, healer, saviour, impartial judge... However God is the accuser, adversary, enemy, spy, destroyer, hunter, siege commander, a brutal, indifferent, insensitive, distant, powerful and oppressive God.⁶ He has not cursed God and yet he has fought so bitter a battle.

Anyone who has studied the final part of the book knows of the great diversity in interpretations. In response to Job the voice of God comes from within a whirlwind or storm. This is a theophany. There are two 'speeches' and we shall briefly look at each. In the first address *the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind*: "*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me* [38:1-2].

God does not disregard Job or speak to him like his friends or Elihu. Job is challenged to enter into a contest as it were with God. As Job showed uninhibited vigor in his growing confrontation with God, God demands equal vigor from his opponent who is to brace himself for the fight and answer the flow of rhetorical questions. The barrage of

questions, quite ironic and maybe playful, range over the mysteries of creation of the cosmos and of certain animals and the governance of the world. Job must be left dumbfounded by his utter inadequacy. Concluding his questions *the LORD said to Job: "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond."* [40:1-2] or in the words of Habel's translation, *Yahweh answered Job and said, "Will the one with a suit against Shaddai correct me? Will the one arraigning Eloah answer me"?*

God is aware that Job has insisted on a court case and had placed his accusations against God's ways of governing the world. However mentioning this at the end of the speech, God does not take up any of the accusations or the question of Job's innocence. In a way this whole area has been dealt with in the initial narrative. Maybe in Job's answer we will have some hints about the purpose of God's series of questions.

"See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further." [40:4-5].

Is Job being evasive and refusing the challenge or does he admit to the utter limits of his knowledge and inability to actually question God and to grasp God's ways? Authors differ in their judgment of this response. We do note that taking up the initial question of Ch 38 in his final response Job acknowledges more clearly his inadequacies.

In the second round of questions God is more aggressive and immediately takes up explicitly the issue of evil and his own governance of the world in the face of chaos. Indirectly this was addressed in his first series of questions about the morning [31:12-15]. There is an either/or choice before Job as God says: *Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?* [40:8]

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you declare to me... Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? "Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on all who are proud, and abase them. Look on all who are proud, and bring them low; tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then I will also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can give you victory. [40:6-14]

The following description of the two mythical animals conjures up the sense of chaotic power and mystery which no one but God can control. These two beasts are further examples of the picture of chaos related to evil which God challenges Job to master. Job's reply points to three aspects of his experience and takes up both series of questions as the text indicates with the modified quotations of God's words. "Then Job answered the LORD

"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. [1st Aspect]

'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' [God's words- 38:2]

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. [2nd Aspect]

'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' [God's words- 38:3/ 40:7]

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; [3rd Aspect]

therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." [42:1-6]

Then Job answered Yahweh and said:

I know that you can do everything, and that no scheme of yours can be thwarted

[You said] "Who is this who obscures my design without knowledge"

Indeed, I spoke without discernment of things beyond me which I did not know.

[You said] "Hear now and I will speak, I will ask and you will inform me?"

I have heard of you with my ears but now my eyes see you. Therefore I retract and repent of dust and ashes.
[42:1-6 -Habel]

Job acknowledges the divine power in the governance of the whole of cosmos and of the chaotic power and mystery of evil. He is aware of the enormous limits to his own knowledge and wisdom. He cannot possibly question God and much less arraign him in a court of law. I follow Habel and not the NRSV and NIV and many authors in the interpretation of the final statement.⁷ Job compares the knowledge he

7 Habel, *The Book of Job*, 577-83

had of God prior to this scene, a knowledge which he describes as *I have heard of you with my ears* and the new experience. He does not state that he has had a vision of God but rather describes this new experience in visionary terms of *now my eyes see you*. This type of knowledge is incomparably better than his earlier knowledge. The result is that he withdraws his demand for a court case to prove his innocence and call God to account and also brings his long complaint and lament to an end. We must be careful that we do not interpret the text in terms of a confession of sinfulness and a ritual of repentance or of an acknowledgement of self-debasement. How could God immediately acknowledge Job and condemn the other three? How could Job throw away his constant affirmation of innocence? How could his response negate the opening picture of this blameless person?

The intense and bold prayers of lament and complaint, the anger and sarcasm, the accusations and the bitterness and the strange confidence and persistent personal relationship to God are part of the journey with God of a person in great suffering. The book probably reminds us that from such persistent prayer will emerge a new experience of God and a new fullness.

Job shares the theology of retributive justice with his friends, yet his innocence forces him to search for a face of God which will explain his situation. He does not have an adequate theology available. Can we say that finally he opens out for others an option. His innocence demands divine blessing, but his experience is of inexplicable divine punishment. Does his journey of prayer force upon him the possibility of a faith option to believe in God who is gracious and loyal beyond all imagination, the arbiter for whom he searched who would be his redeemer because of his own love and beyond all human deserts. Does he come across to us as one who relates to God as God and not for reward, a model of disinterested religion which demands a God of unconditional loyalty and graciousness found paradoxically in utter misery and inexplicable suffering and prayer which astounds us? Does Job teach us that God allows us to grapple with him with emotional honesty in darkness, a darkness he allows to remain for a long time and yet not forever.

Prophetic Prayer as Carrying and Proclaiming the Word of God

Zephyrinus Baxla

Prophets and prayer are inseparable. They are persons who have to stand before God constantly especially in the context of the crises of the people. That standing before God takes various forms: questioning, challenging, defending, petitioning, confronting, bargaining, submitting, waiting, surrendering etc. They become really life expressions and models of actual human life-cries.

1. Introduction

The divine-human relationship takes a charismatic turn in the prophetic period. The guiding line of this relationship is the divine word uttered by the prophets who are charismatic figures. Their all time concern is people's fidelity to Yahweh and justice in the society. Any failure in the twin task of proclaiming fidelity to Yahweh and aiming eradication of injustice in the society invited natural calamity and invasion by the enemies. Yahweh, who punished his covenant partners, hid his face from them and exiled them to distant lands. Yet amidst volley of incessant invectives the prophets always held out a ray of hope (Am 2:3; Mic 7:17; Is 32:1)¹. Isaiah 40-55, which could be the response to Isaiah 1-39, is poetry of newness². 'Third Isaiah includes compositions that could be classified as prophetic liturgies, hymns with prophetic intercession, all within the context of future hope³. All the

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1. Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism." *CBQ* 64.3 (July 2002), 472
 2. Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1989, 46
 3. Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism." *CBQ* 64.3 (July 2002), 472

prophets placed at God's disposition their language, lending their flesh and blood, life and expression of their tongue so that God's own Word may be incarnated in them⁴. They become an active channel of the divine word, a task almost imposed by God in each case and no excuses are entertained⁵. A typical expression of this all time concern is Jeremiah's confession, "I would say to myself, 'I will not think about him, I will not speak in his name any more, but then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones'" (Jer 20:9). A prophet is a man of God (IK 20:28) who relentlessly proclaims the divine word and ensures its incarnation in real life.

This brief article intends to bring out the prayer aspect of the prophetic ministry, which assumes an intercessory role for the people of God. There is a clear parallel between the life of the prophet and the life of prayer of the people. Both arise out of the prevalent situation in the society and address existential problems. The life of the prophet is an answer to the burning problems the society faces.

In the pages that follow an attempt is made
To understand prayer in the prophetic period
Prayer as word, an agent of transformation
Word incarnated in the life of the prophet

2. Prophetic Understanding of Prayer

The entire prophetic literature can be considered as one single prayer addressed to God on behalf of the people. However there are specific instances, which help understanding of prayer in the prophetic period in a more specific way.

2.1. Prayer is central to the community and individual life

In the Hebrew tradition, prayer occupies a central position. Prayers expressed in words are 'the outpourings of the soul'⁶ and the place par excellence for prayer is the human heart (Ho 7:14)⁷.

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4. L. Alonso Schoekel and J.L. Sicre Diaz, *I Propheti*, Borla, Roma 1980, 19. The author gives a brief but excellent comment on God's Word in pp 16-28
 5. G. Friendrich (ed.), G.W.Bromiley (tr.) "Prohet" in *TDNT*, Vol. VI, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1982, 801
 6. P. Birnbaum, *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Concepts*, Hebrew Publishing House, New York, 1979, 654
 7. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol 13, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1974, 979

2.2. Attitude to prayer is crucial

According to the prophets postures and gestures in prayer ought to be that of fasting, mourning and weeping (Is 58:2-5; Joel 2:2) and the attitude should be earnestness of the heart (Joel 2:13) Mere rituals are not enough and hypocritical worship is an abomination (Is 1:15; Amos 4:4ff). Prayers uttered with improper attitude of heart go unanswered (Is 29:13ff)⁸.

2.3. Prayer transforms a person

Prayer uttered with one's whole heart is usually always answered and when answered it brings about a significant change of spirit and outlook. It is a great instrument of human regeneration and salvation; worthy even of martyrdom (Dan 6:11)⁹. Isaiah was transformed into a prophet (Is 6:5-8) and Jeremiah became 'a laughing stock all day long (Jer 20:7)¹⁰. Often God answers people's prayer even before they call upon him (Is 65:24; Dan 9, 20ff). This he does because not only they beseech God, but also God seeks them (Is 50:2; 65:12). The I-Thou relationship is reciprocal. Prayer and prophecy were closely correlated, the former providing spiritual soil in which revelatory seed took root (Jer 1:6ff; Hab 1:13-2:3). Prayer could be an emotional outpouring of the heart assuming even a tempestuous character (Jer 12)¹¹.

2.4. Prayer as communal

Though there is virtual war declared by the prophets on high places (Am 3:14) in the prophetic period, temple is also a house of prayer for all people (Is 56:7). In fact cult and temple are also central themes to prophetic preaching and prayers are offered in holy places and cultic contexts (Is 16:12) because they are essentially communitarian¹². The

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8. Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol 13, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1974, 980
 9. Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol 13, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1974, 981
 10. Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol 13, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1974, 980
 11. Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol 13, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1974, 981
 12. G. Gerstenberger, "pll" in J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (Ed.), *TDOT*, Vol IX, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 572.

Jews have always been intensely group-conscious and their prayers are for the most part in the first person plural¹³. When Jeremiah speaks of 'you' in his letter he has clearly the congregation in mind (Jer 29: 7ff. 12ff)¹⁴.

2.5. Prophetic prayer is essentially an intercession

Prayer in the prophetic corpus can mean anything like, "to seek" (Amos 5:4), "to seek the face of God" (Ho 5:15), "to encounter or to raise plea" (Jer 7:16)¹⁵. The nature of the prayer is revealed in the nominal term *tephilah*, which means 'invocation of God as judge'¹⁶. Now only an innocent person can appeal to a judge or act as mediator and 'intercede' for someone else. The verbal root *pll* of the term *tephilah*, used reflexively in fact means, "to intercede" (viz "to interpose as mediator")¹⁷. Prophets for instance uttered prayers for essential need on behalf of the people (Jer 14, 1ff. 15ff; Amos 7:2)¹⁸ and their prayer was essentially one of mediation and petition (Jer 20:7ff).¹⁹ The prophets always interceded on behalf of their people and Jeremiah could be considered the intercessor par excellence (Jer 32:16; 37:3; 42:2.4.20). When Jeremiah's very life and vocation are under attack and the situation is hopeless, he fights for the survival of the community (Jer 11:14; 14:11)²⁰.

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13. P. Birnbaum, *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Concepts*, Hebrew Publishing House, New York, 1979, 654
 14. G. Gerstenberger, "pll" in J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (Ed.), *TDOT*, Vol IX, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 571
 15. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol 13, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1974, 979
 16. P. Birnbaum, *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Concepts*, Hebrew Publishing House, New York, 1979, 654
 17. Samuel P. Tregelles (tr), Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, 1979, 676
 18. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol 13, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1974, 979
 19. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol 13, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1974, 978; G. Gerstenberger, "pll" in J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (Ed.) *TDOT*, Vol IX, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 576;
 20. G. Gerstenberger, "pll" in J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (Ed.), *TDOT*, Vol IX, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 573

3. Word: An Agent of Transformation

Not the weapons of mass destruction but a prayer in poetry can bring about transformation of the masses. The prophets went for poetry set in liturgy for the desired transformation of the society. They used the language and forms of psalmody with their focus on the present day generation but with a window to the future of total renewal²¹.

3.1. Yahweh's word renews the face of the earth

Campaign for the new world is couched in perfect poetry that contains seeds for a change within. "Home coming is the imaginative appropriation of a new world which can be embraced in the liturgy and can be practiced concretely here and now."²² "For as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before having watered the earth fertilizing it and making it germinate, to provide seed for the sower and food to eat, so it is with the word that goes from my mouth, it will not return to me unfulfilled, or before having carried out my good pleasure, and having achieved what it was sent to do" (Is 55:10-11).

This poem is a classical example of fulfilment without fail. The divine word proclaimed by the prophet will be as effective as rain that renews the face of the earth. The word comes down like rain brings heaven closer to earth and God closer to humans.²³

3.2. The divine word shapes human history

The word play in the poem that is to follow is able to dismantle the political fabric of Babylon. When compared to the divine word uttered by the prophet everything is transitory.²⁴

"A voice said, 'cry aloud!' and I said, 'What shall I cry?'"

'All humanity is grass and all its beauty like the wild flower's

The grass withers; the flower fades when the breath of Yahweh blows on them (The grass is surely the people)

The grass withers, the flower fades but the word of our God remains forever."

21. Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism". *CBQ* 64.3 (July 2002), 472

22. Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1989, 50

23. L. Alonso Schoekel and J.L. Sicre Diaz, *I Propheti*, Borla, Roma, 1980, 384

24. Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1989, 126

(Is 40, 6ff) The divine word is active in history. It never fails. It accomplishes all that it intends.²⁵

Purification by the word is part of the community crises of faith.

“Yahweh demands, ‘is my word not like fire?’

Yahweh demands, ‘is not like a hammer shattering the rock?’

(Jer 23:29)

3.3. Yahweh’s word renews national history

The prophetic proclamation of Yahweh’s word can turn a whoring matron into a virgin daughter.

“Behind door and doorpost you have set your reminder, yes, far removed from me you unroll your bedding, climb into it and spread it wide.

You have struck a pact with those whose bed you love,

Whoring with them often with your eyes on the sacred symbol...”

(Is 57: 8ff)

The people of God and more specifically Jerusalem, the capital where the nation’s fate is decided is what Isaiah intends. But through the prophetic ministry, Jerusalem puts away her whoring habit and puts on integrity of life:

“The nations then will see your integrity, all the kings your glory... like a young man marrying a virgin, so will the one who built you wed you and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you.” (Is 62:2ff)

This radical change is brought about by God’s forgiveness that is total. God’s forgiveness of his people cancels the past life of sinfulness and makes them new creatures. The best comparison is turning the whore into a virgin, a mysterious recreation possible with God giving hope yet another chance.²⁶

The intercessory prayer of the prophet brings about a new flourish of life and change from the hopeless situation to the one of rock like integrity. The prophet refuses to be silent till this is achieved.

25. G.A.E. Knight, *Servant Theology*, Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1984, 14

26. Cfr. F. I. Andersen & D.N. Freedman, *Hosea*, Doubleday, New York, 1980, 283

3.4. Yahweh's word changes the society

In the call narrative of Jeremiah Yahweh is quoted to say,

"There I have put my words into your mouth, Look, today I have set you over the nations and kingdoms, to uproot and to knock down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer 1:10)

The prophetic proclamation of the word was aimed at radical transformation of the society.

3.5. Yahweh's voice changes the life of the prophet

At the behest of the divine word, unwilling individuals become zealous campaigners. Obedience to the word is absolute though some prophets initially hesitated. Amos is unafraid in face of royal opposition: "I was a shepherd and looked after sycamores; but it was Yahweh who took me from herding the flock, and Yahweh who said, 'Go prophesy to my people Israel. 'So listen to the word of Yahweh ...' (Am 7:15ff)

Hosea under Yahweh's order married a whore. Though he loved her, he was never loved in return (Ho 2). Hosea translates the divine word into his own personal and family life. He mirrors the divine attitude towards the humankind.

Encounter with the divine enables the prophet to accept his mission to transform the society. "I then heard the voice of the Lord saying; whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And I said, 'Here am I, send me' (Is 6:8ff). Isaiah receives his call in a theophany. He hears Yahweh's voice and that is enough to bring forth a "Yes" from the prophet. He is set apart by the word for a specific mission.

In the call narrative of Jeremiah it is made even clearer that the prophet already exists in the divine action plan of saving his people. He is so singled out from the rest of humanity that he could not afford the luxury and comfort of a wife (Jer 16:1) and family life (Jer 12:6).

"The word of Yahweh came to me saying:

'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I appointed you as prophet to the nations.' I then said, 'Ah, ah, ah Lord Yahweh; you see, I do not know how to speak: I am only a child!'

But Yahweh replied,

'Do not say, "I am only a child", for you must go to all to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of confronting them. For I am with you to rescue you', Yahweh declares.

Then Yahweh stretched out his hand and touched my mouth and Yahweh said to me:

‘There! I have put my words into your mouth,
Look, today I have set you
Over the nations and kingdoms
To uproot and to knock down,
To destroy and to overthrow,
To build and to plant.’ (Jer 1:6ff)

The divine word through the prophetic proclamation will not only bring about a radical and complete change in the Hebrew society but into the individual as well. It is a call that compels the prophet to change the course of his life (Jer 16). The prophet has to make a radical choice to abide by the divine word all the days of his life. He sits alone (Jer 15: 17). He is singled out of any crowd. He is deprived of the most natural intimacy with another person. He is forbidden to take a wife (Jer 16:1). Isolation is total. He belongs to Yahweh from before the time of his conception. In the divine plan he was destined for the service of the word and of his society.²⁷

4. Word: An Incarnation

Isaiah 52:12-53, 12 is a perfect example of a prayer where words are not in use.²⁸ Life itself becomes a prayer and its role is intercessory. The poem breaks the sin-suffering-death sequence and says that not the guilty alone but also an innocent person can suffer. And the suffering of that innocent person as the crowd in the poem clearly confesses is meant for the atonement of sins of others and not of the sufferer. An associated message of this powerful poetic piece is clear: only an innocent person can intercede for others. God accepts the ram without blemish as a substitute offering in place of the sinful family (Lev 5:14).²⁹ Second Isaiah realized that neither Israel as a community nor the Israelite as an

27. Cfr also Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, SCM Press, London, 1985, 341

28. We intend to read this poetic applying the most recent method of strategic planning in any endeavour. The reason for such attempt is that it perhaps this would be the best way of understanding a prophetic project with profit. For the interpretive reading it follows L. Alonso Schoekel and J.L. Sicre Diaz, *I Profeti*

29. G.A.E. Knight, *Servant Theology*, Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1984, 177

individual could be without sin and so in a position to intercede for others. Only a divine-human figure could, who because of his divine nature could not be corrupted and because of his human nature had to suffer. This anonymous and enigmatic figure unfolded in poetry breaks the impasse of the sinful humanity's inability to atone for its sinfulness and anticipates the Word made flesh in the person of Christ.³⁰ All that is described in the poem is the logical consequence of this word being made flesh.

4.1. The poetic vision (52:13; 53:10-12)

The beginning of the poem recalls Is 42:1-4. At the very outset God affirms the success of his servant, his glory and his exaltation. Everything is directed to this end and the proclamation is infallible. Sin is not the cause of suffering and that innocent suffering endured in silence can ensure salvation for the community. All that is described in the poem could be taken as a complete incarnation process in stages: Birth (v 2), Suffering and Passion (v v 3-7), Condemnation and Death (v 8), Burial (v 9). It is the Journey of the divine word made flesh and hence glorification (v v. 10-12) is guaranteed.

In the thanksgiving psalms the man narrates his misfortune and his liberation and together he invites others to trust and to fidelity (Ps 30; 32; 107). Thus he considers misfortune a part of his own life in the light of actual liberation. Here the disaster had been total: from birth till death; therefore the liberation has to embrace the whole life, overcoming death itself. Only a total liberation can match a total disaster: and so death is not an end. All this life of pain had been a design of God; his plan shrouded in mystery but already loaded with salvation; Yahweh had willed it and had accepted it and therefore had value. Now the vigour and fruitfulness of the sapling is unveiled (v 2); the life that overcomes violence of death (v 8), success that of failure. The just contemplates the light (Ps 36:10) and is satisfied with the knowledge of God (Ps 115).

God confirms the message with his oracle. He annuls the human verdict declaring his servant "innocent", still more, his innocent suffering will justify many; these men justified that is liberated from the deserved condemnation will be the crown of his victory. His life, passion and

30. L. Alonso Schoekel and J.L. Sicre Diaz, *I Propheti*, Borla, Roma 1980, 377

death had been an intercession and had been accepted by Yahweh. His silence had been a prayer heard by God.

There is no end to the attempts at identification of the figure of the servant of Yahweh. The anonymous suffering individual and not a mere personification; created by God, different from the idols; with a mission toward Israel and toward the pagans. In 49:5ff he is clearly distinguished from Israel, in 50:10 from those addressed and in 53 from those who contemplate and narrate the fate of the figure.

It is a dramatic vocation like that of Jeremiah nevertheless glorious through suffering. It is the paradox of triumph through failure: it is the word and the silence, the incomprehensible and the luminous, a mysterious presence of a God hidden in the servant. It is the divine word incarnated. The poem can be termed as the autobiography of the nameless deuteron-Isaiah. But the entire Christian tradition applies this passage to Christ the Redeemer.

4.2. The servant's mission (52:14-53, 9)

The mission assigned to the servant was innocent suffering in silence. The sufferings were many and varied.

4.2.1. *Mental agony (52:14-15)*

He knew what he had to undergo but he could not open his mouth. The suffering disfigure the man, obscure the image of God, a disfigured face can evoke a horror almost sacred (Job 2:12-13). Those who witness will hardly believe that he is innocent but he could not explain that. His exaltation too will produce a surprise and marvellous correspondence. If the liberation of the just in Psalms makes an impact on the people (Ps 63:10), this liberation will be something unheard of, a new reality in the history of salvation.

4.2.2. *Psychological suffering (53:1)*

An anonymous group begins to speak, underlining the great novelty of the message. Frequently the hand of the Lord is revealed active in history; but this new action is difficult to understand and his revelation has difficulty in being accepted. And when the prophetic proclamation narrates and explains it, those who hear it fail to believe the message. Neither sight nor hearing seems to be able to accept new mystery. Those who speak, nevertheless proclaim their message in the hope of at least some one may believe and understand.

4.2.3. *Life of Obscurity and Isolation (2-3)*

He is born and grows. Everything remains anonymous: His ancestors could have been kings, prophets or priests, the land could be the Promised Land, and he could bear an illustrious name. All this remains obscure, and nothing else but a pure presence that speaks of pain and humiliation. It is a sapling: the life continues but the land cannot give nourishment. It is a man but disfigured; lives in a society but despised; to the physical pain and suffering is added abandonment by almost all who interpret suffering as punishment of God (theory of retribution/theory of karma) and are afraid to be contaminated if they approach him (leprosy/aids) and cover their face to avoid his gaze. These are themes also treated in the individual lamentation psalms (31 & 69), only that here the words are spoken of by others; by a group of spectators: the man of sorrows does not speak. He is silent.

4.2.4. *Sufferer does not complain: Spectators confess (4-5)*

In some psalms of lamentation the psalmist confesses his sin, asks pardon and grace (Ps 38 & 39). Here instead, the spectators, who confess their sins: that is these “pains” and these ‘sufferings’ are a proof yes of a sin, a sin but not of the one suffering but of those who see him suffer. In the beginning they believed (like the friends of Job) that God was punishing him because the suffering is the punishment of the “crimes” and “iniquity”; in reality he was accepting the consequence of sin, and with his suffering innocently was opening the eyes of others that they may recognize their own sin. Suffering and sin are thus separated: the punishment is “ours” and the suffering is “his”; it became “a salvifying punishment” because it has offered us repentance and pardon. The contrast is in that “we were judging him... he in stead...” Thus the paradox of a “punishment” which brings peace and “wounds” that “heal” is explained.

4.2.5. *Confession by the public (Vv 6-7)*

A new confession of sin, with the image of the sheep, that recalls the people of God, desolated and dispersed. It is also a confession of the fact that Yahweh has done all this.

Already in the beginning indirectly the silence of the servant was revealing itself from the moment the lamentation and the confession of sin were being pronounced by the others. Now that silence comes to be

underlined expressly because it was the eloquent word as a symbolic action of a prophet that has no need of explanation. This silence is contrasted with the stream of complaining words coming from Job. The mute sheep is opposed to the straying sheep; the image that already enables to see the theme of judgment and condemnation.

4.2.6. *Condemnation (V8)*

Till now they have spoken of physical pains and of contempt. Now they speak of a judgment of one unjustly condemned, which are also themes of lamentation psalms (7;35; 109). The difference lies in the fact the servant does not defend himself nor does he invoke punishment on his own enemies.

4.2.7. *Death and burial (V9)*

The burial puts a seal on a life of all pain and contempt. He ends up in a common ditch of the convicted. Those who narrate his life add as an epitaph: was innocent in word and deed. It is not he to say that, in other words it is not he who protests his innocence as it is commonly done in the psalms against an unjust accusation. The "servant" complained neither during his lifetime nor on hearing the judgment of capital punishment pronounced on him. It is others who are to pronounce the declaration of his innocence and that too only after his death.

4.3. Goal

The short-term goal of the poem seems to be patience in enduring suffering caused by the Babylonian exile. The long-term goal of the same is an eschatological restoration of peoples individually or as a community. The poem seems to suggest that he who created human beings will also save them as in other compositions like Is 42:10-13; 44:23; 45:8; 49:13.³¹

4.4. The target Group

The poet addresses the entire humanity. The anonymous suffering servant is a role model for every individual that comes into this world. If the individual is upright the merit of his sufferings and pain will be for others. If he commits sin he will have to be busy making amends for

31. Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism". *CBQ* 64.3 (July 2002), 473

his own sins. He will have no time in his life or space in his heart. And so the figure of the innocent suffering servant will appeal to all men irrespective of their religion or race.

4.5. Agents of Transformation

A wide if not wild range of names is suggested for the protagonist of this exquisite poem. The list includes among others Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah or Deutero-Isaiah himself.³² Simple reading of the poem would suggest that it is the poet himself and all those who read the poem or hear it read out to them. The poem clearly tells the reader that the life of an innocent person suffering silently will justify many. But this is not automatic. Those who hear it read out to them or read it on their own must decide to change their lives and model them after the innocent suffering servant. The decision has to come each because a person is free.

4.6. Means

The means to realize the goals and proceed to appropriate the vision is the Divine word lived out fully in one's own life. In other words the divine word must incarnate itself in each human being, the Jews first but also the rest of humanity.

4.7. SWOT Analysis

In the form of swot analysis it can be said that the strength of the people was their covenantal relationship, weakness their infidelity and lack of concern for their fellow beings, opportunity was to repent and threat was being forgotten by God and by the generations of men ever after.

5. Conclusion

Only the blood of a blameless Abel could intercede for his parents (Gen 4:10). God heard his prayer and Seth was born to Adam and Eve (Gen 4:25). Only a blameless, upright, always avoiding evil and God-fearing person like Job (Job 1:8; 2,3) could intercede for others. "While Job my servant offers prayers for you, I will listen to him with favour and excuse your folly in not speaking of me properly as my servant Job has done" (Job 42:8). "The sacrifice of the wicked is abhorrent to Yahweh dear to him is the prayer of honest men" (15:8).

32. G.A.E. Knight, *Servant Theology*, Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1984, 166

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus said, "Father if you are willing, take this cup away from me, but let your will be done, not mine" (Lk 22: 42ff). This cry of anguish and desolation was repeated on the cross when Jesus cried out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me" (Mt 27:46) yet only the immaculate lamb of God could say, "Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). And innocent Stephen could cry in a loud voice, "Lord do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60).

"During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears to the one who had the power to save him from death and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard. Although he was Son, he learnt to obey through suffering, but having been made perfect, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation and was acclaimed by God with the title of high priest of the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:7-10). His entire life had to be a prayer like the silent suffering servant (Is 52:12-53: 12).

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Prayer as Model of Communication in the Gospels

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The prayers in the Gospels are usually read merely as prayers focussing on the content of the prayer itself. They have more than that of a function in terms of models of communication. This perspective is used in re-reading three prayers of Jesus in Mark, Matthew and John. They are in the form of prayer-theological-synthesis in relation to christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, missiology and eschatology. This is a challenge to modern means of communication which are considered the most effective ones. But prayer is able to touch, in its communicative process, the depth of the persons involved and lead to ultimate decisions, regarding life.

Introduction

In an age of media explosion and in a society pulsating with the intense desire for luxurious worldly life it would be hard to drive home to someone that prayer is a medium of communication. Communication has become very fast and terribly wide that the depth dimension is no more a point of consideration in an evaluation. It is a naked fact of our own experience that while the range of communication has widened itself, the relationships have become more and more superficial and selfish. Even while one may make contact with persons in the different corners of the world, one may fail, to have any contact with the one closest to oneself.

Moreover, even communications and relationships have become issues of prestige and honour, nay, consumeristic and profit-oriented. People are interested only in those relationships which can give them some advantage or benefit immediately or in the near future. Once that benefit has been received the relationship ceases to have any relevance.

Hence the question: how can we recreate the possibility for an authentic communication and relationship?

The prayer tradition read from the point of view of medium of communication becomes a model of authentic communication. They are not merely prayer texts but also meta-communication texts. Hence they are important not only for their content but also for their function.

Mk 1:35-39

The type of ministry of Jesus crystallized in the first day of Jesus at Capernaum by Mark (1:21-34) is concluded with a narration of what happened early morning of the next day (1:35-39). It is a further clarification of the mission of Jesus and of the disciples who participate in it.

Before identifying the meaning of Jesus' prayer in this context let us see the articulation of the text.

And in the morning

a great while before the day

→ he rose and went out

to a lonely place

and there

→ he prayed

And Simon and those who were with him

followed him

They found him and said to him

ALL ARE SEARCHING FOR YOU

→ And he said to him

→ Let us go on to the next towns

that I may preach there also

for that is why I came out

And he went throughout all Galilee

preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

There are two actions performed by two main actors, namely, Jesus and Simon. Jesus' reply is the central message. This is an interpretation

of what Jesus does at the beginning: went out, prayed. The actions performed by Simon and others are sought, found and said.

There is a contrast between what Jesus says and what they say:

“All are searching for you”

X

“Let us go to the next towns”

“Early morning, a great while before the day” corresponds to one of the fixed times of Jewish prayer (Ps 55:18; Dan 6:11; Ps 92:3; Ps 4; Ps 5; Ps 119:55; Wis 16:27). It can be the “Shema” prayer to be recited early morning before sunrise.

Jesus kept the Jewish tradition of prayer. At the same time, Jesus challenges that tradition by introducing a new way of prayer: going out, praying in a lonely place all alone. While clinging to the tradition he was bringing out its authenticity through his life practice.

The words of Jesus in his reply to Simon interpret his action of prayer. By deciding to go to other towns and refusing to go to the people eagerly waiting for him inside the house Jesus manifested the source of his mission. Actually the source of the mission is articulated in the action of prayer. That he was concerned about the realization of the plan of the Father was revealed through his contact with Him in prayer. It is the expression of the verticality of Jesus’ mission. In turn, this verticality demands that Jesus should not yield to the selfish desire of the people who are impressed by his miracles but are not able to link to the power of the Father who sent him. Their look is for the material or physical benefits from this relationship. Jesus is conscious of his mission as universal and that dimension is communicated through the act of prayer.

The report of the further movement of Jesus shows the execution of the new vision that emerged through prayer or in prayer.

So Mk tells us not only that Jesus prayed but also conveys the fact that the prayer is the means for manifesting the verticality of Jesus mission.

Mt 11:25-30

Syntactically Mt 11:25-30 is an internally coherent unit. Semantically it is a unique summary of the Gospel message containing the decisive salvific significance of Jesus as the authentic revealer originating from

God the Father, the sovereign of salvation history and the urgent invitation that flows from it: to have the option for Jesus. Thematically this message has been expressed in diverse texts in various forms and grades accenting one or the other of its dimensions at different stages of the gospel narrative. The selected texts (1:18-25; 3:13-17; 5:1-12; 11:2-6; 12:15-21; 16:13-20; 17:1-8; 26:36-46; 28:16-20) together with Mt 11:25-30 make rhetorical, strategic, communicative arches through the repetition of the central message.

In this strategic tactic and process of communication Mt 11:25-30 is not just one among many texts, granted its semantic distinction, singularity and comprehensive nature and contextual speciality. From the point of view of context Mt 11:25-30 forms part of the "interfatio" of the Gospel narrative. Structurally the "interfatio" divides the narrative into two, creating a review of the first part and a preview of the second. That is an important clue to the function of the text.

In the context of chapter 11, 11:25-30 is the culminating crystallization and summary of the thematic development inaugurated in 11:2. It is a comprehensive and all encompassing reverbalization of the central theme of chapter 11: the definite fulfillment of the messianic prophecies and the arrival of salvation in the person and mission of Jesus; the reactions and responses to this crucial salvific event embodied in the opposition or acceptance. In other words, it is the core of the literary unit 11:2-30. Its language is distinct from other pericopes. Its "gattung" is prayer. It gives the basic interpretive keys to the Christ event. The subunits of 11:2-24 do not make a categorical distinction between the opponents and disciples of Jesus but remain rather general.

The definitiveness comes in 11:25-30, with the acknowledgement and confession of the sovereign God, the Father who hides the salvific significance of the person and mission of Jesus, His son from the wise and the intelligent and reveals it to the simple in accordance with his design. It highlights God's fundamental preference and option for the poor. This is the basic logic of the unfolding of salvation history. It is an explicit foreshadowing of the definite division reported in 13:11. Hence the invitation is addressed only to those who are like the simple. It is an anticipation of the close circle of disciples in the following part of the Gospel whom Jesus instructs and teaches privately. Therefore the thematic unfolding of 11:24-30 reaches its culminating definiteness in 11:25-30.

Compared with the preceding sections of the unit, this text is distinct by its language of communication. The language here that verbalizes the unique salvific significance of Jesus is that of the intimate, personal and unique relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son receives the mission from the Father who is the sovereign of the salvific plan. The Son being gentle and lowly, places himself totally at the disposal of the good pleasure of the Father.

Our concern in this reflection is the literary genre of the passage. This too distinguishes the passage from the other units. The particular communicative purpose and function that fastens the text giving it a definite orientation and effective modelling is prayer. Every component element of the passage is stamped and engraved by this character. It encompasses Jesus' address to God, expression of his self-consciousness which includes his mission and address to the community. The community is integrally within the prayer. The focal point is the relationship of the praying subject to God and consequent demand and urgency to respond to his invitation. Prayer here is a medium for communicating the message of the salvific significance of Jesus and its crucial character.

The whole chapter 11 can be interpreted in the light of 11:25-30. Here the source of Jesus person and mission articulated in different pericopes is clearly indicated in the focussed form. Father's handing over of the salvific mission, authority and everything related to its fulfillment to the son who offers himself totally to His will. The opposition and rejection that it faces and the acceptance and recognition that it gathers hinted in each of the pericopes are placed in the framework of salvific design and good pleasure of the sovereign God and Father. Jesus' person, conduct and attitude are living expressions of God's way of bringing salvation to men through a basic attitude of preferential love in favour of the poor.

So in chapter 11, 11:25-30 completes the thematic development, summarises and highlights the content of the section with the determinate language of the "son of God". Modelled as prayer as different from other pericopes it underscores and crystallizes the communicative function in relation to the salvific significance of the person of Jesus. This text is therefore the kernel of the "interfatio" of the Gospel narrative.

Jesus' unique and intimate relation to God the Father, his unconditional and loving submission to his will and plan of salvation and his docile acceptance of suffering as part of the fulfillment of that plan are all crystallized in the pericope. However, the intention is not merely to communicate these facts but also to inspire and inculcate a definite response of discipleship. This pragmatic purpose is demonstrated in the interlacing of the prayer of Jesus to the Father with his invitation to discipleship.

To summarize, Mt 11:25-30 is found in the interlatio of the Gospel narrative, at the turning point of the ministry of Jesus. Using prayer as a medium of communication Jesus is revealing the crucial significance of his person. When people reject him, instead of bringing arguments to prove himself, he is turning to the Father and is conversing with him. It becomes the best and effective communication of his mission and its authenticity to the people. That is why there is the shift in this prayer from I-you style to the third person He-style and then back to I-you style (11:25-26; 27:28-30).

Jn 17:1-26

Traditionally known as the priestly prayer of Jesus in the fourth Gospel, chapter 17 is the conclusion to the ministry of Jesus. After this John narrates the hour of Jesus. Our aim here is to show that this prayer has a communicative function beyond the transmission of the content of the prayer. In this sense it is better to call it "the final prayer of Jesus". What difference does it make when we accept this title?

Jn 17:1-26 makes a perfect unity on the basis of an inclusion through the repetition of the words: "when Jesus had spoken these words" (17:1; 18:1). In 16:33 we have the conclusion of the final discourse of Jesus and in 18:1 begins the passion narrative with the report of the arrest of Jesus. Chapter 17 is called prayer since it begins with the words, "he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said..." (17:1b). Lifting up the eyes is a symbol of prayer (Jn 11:41).

The purpose of John in this chapter is to conclude the ministry of Jesus. At that juncture of the narration the evangelist wants to give the reader/hearer a possibility to recall all the essential aspects of the message so far presented through the signs and discourses of Jesus: Who is Jesus, what has happened in the history of salvation through Jesus and what happens to a disciple and through the disciple to the future disciples of

Jesus. In other words, the aim of the evangelist is to articulate in a synthesis the christological revelation in Jesus, the soteriological effect of it in the lives of human beings and the consequent ecclesiological and missiological effects and the eschatological mission emerging from the same.

The text is divided into three parts: Jesus' prayer for himself (17:1-5); Jesus' prayer for the disciples (6-19) and Jesus' prayer for the future disciples (20-26). In all the three Jesus is addressing the Father and in the form of a dialogue with him he is revealing his own identity and the source of his authenticity and then the identity of the disciples and the future disciples and the various dimensions of their mission. Hence here we have through prayer the articulation of the Christ event, Salvation event and the Church event. The aim is to give to the reader/hearer the possibility to reidentify oneself with the right persons and attitudes before entering the very important phase of the revelation of the glory through the passion and death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus' prayer for himself which is similar to the Lord's prayer in the synoptic tradition asks God to glorify Jesus. It is addressed to the Father. This shows the intimate and unique relationship between Jesus and God. The "hour" is the johannine synthesis of the pascal event. Father can glorify the son only through his passion and death. That is the moment of the climax of revelation. Jesus says that the Father has given to the son the power to give eternal life to all whom He himself has given. So Jesus clarifies that the source of revelation is Father himself. Even those who believe in Jesus are those called by the Father. Then the eternal life is defined as "knowing the Father and Jesus whom Father has sent". Jesus is the revealer of the Father and the revelation of the Father. "No body has seen the Father except the only son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." (1:18) Then it summarizes the ministry of Jesus through the signs and discourses which were the means for the glorification of the Father and for the fulfillment of his plan: "My food is to do the will of my Father" (4:34); "knowing that everything has been accomplished....he said...Everything is accomplished" (19: 28-30). Then the prayer interprets the meaning of death. Jesus came from the Father (descending aspect). The word which was with God and was God became flesh and pitched his tent in our midst (1:1-18). The death is the means to go back to the Father and to the original glory (ascending

aspect). Therefore more than prayer here we have the answers to the questions which are basically christological: who is Jesus? Where did he come from? What was his stage of pre-existence? What was his function in the world? How was this accomplished? What was the result? All the most important words of the vocabulary of John has appeared here in this short text: Father, hour, Son, glorification, eternal life, know, God, work, world, flesh etc.

The prayer for the disciples defines first the discipleship and then verbalizes the mission of these disciples in the world. In verses 6-8 we have the qualities of a disciple. Father calls the disciples; they were given to Jesus by the Father; they keep the word of the Father; they know that Jesus' authenticity is coming from the relationship with the Father; they accept Jesus and have a personal faith relationship with him. Verses 9-19 explains the mission of the disciples in the world especially of persecution and suffering. They have to give witness by keeping the unity; not yielding to the evil one; and being consecrated to the truth. All these ultimately means to live for Jesus to the extent of sacrificing oneself for Christ. Hence prayer here too is a means of articulating the life and mission of a disciple so that the reader/hearer has the possibility to evaluate his/her life and make the right transformations for participating in the paschal mystery.

Finally in Jesus' prayer for the future disciples the ecclesiological and eschatological vision of christian life emerges in a synthetic form. The witness of the disciples evangelizes the world and they grow into a community of unity which respects the diversity and is modelled on the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Every believer and the community of believers are supposed to reach this goal: "in my Father's house there are many rooms and I go to prepare a place for you ... so that where I am there you may be also..." (14:1-4). What the community of believers have to experience and live is the expanding unity leading to that all-embracing and universal community centered on God, one and three, based only on love expressed in mutual abiding. Therefore, in this section too we have the form of prayer for presenting the meaning of the ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions of christian existence, inviting the reader/hearer to life-transforming decisions.

Conclusion

Our aim in these reflections was to show how prayer in the Gospels is the medium of communication and how effective communication is facilitated by prayer. All the three texts we have taken as examples show the fact that when Jesus expresses his intimacy with the Father in prayer it becomes a means to reveal the very source and basis of authenticity of his life. Hence it is basically christological revelation that is mediated by prayer. The content is authenticated by that form. What could have been presented in the form of a speech or discourse etc. but in a very ineffective and unimpressive way is now conveyed with conviction and incentive for a change of life.

All these prayers also reveal the nature of discipleship and challenges for the same. This could have been presented in the form of a teaching, but would not have been as life-touching and life challenging. The structure and form of prayer has created a new effect on the reader/hearer stimulating them for life renewal. Hence prayer is communicative, revelatory, transformative and challenges the superficial and wide range of communication made possible by modern media.

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Prayer: A Pauline Perspective

Tomas d'Aquino Sequeira

Paul was a person of prayer. His conversion story is a prayer text as it involves his openness to the risen Christ which he lets to change himself thoroughly. Hence in all the letters prayer attitude and prayer atmosphere is evident. It appears in the form of praise, thanksgiving, petition or desires etc. It is rewarding to read the letters of Paul from the prayer perspective.

Introduction

Our contemporary world is witnessing a gradual erosion and even a loss of traditional values. The negative impact of the modern media with its frightening scenario of violence, hedonism, unbridled individualism and materialism is, in the eyes of Pope John Paul II, "striking at the very heart of Asian cultures, at the religious character of the people, families and whole societies" (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 7). In this crucial situation, modern man who seemingly wills to build his own world without God's help and blessings, unlike in the prayer of the Psalmist (Ps. 127:1), appears to be less and less praying (*homo orans*).

On the other hand, despite a new brand of atheism manifested by people not needing God, there is a constant search for God and a deep seated yearning for things spiritual. The question of true religion and the need for authentic spirituality are becoming more explicit specially among many young people. This is illustrated in their eager desire for desert experiences and for a more personal experience of God and an intimate relationship with Him. In short, people in the midst of their busy world and the rat race, are longing to keep in touch with God and find in Him the lasting serenity and real strength they very much need...

Though the Scriptures never provide a definition of prayer, yet they assume its pivotal role and centrality in the lives of believers. However multiple may be the perspectives of the human spirituality regarding prayer, all Christian schools of spirituality agree on two points: prayer is necessary for salvation, and it is a gift of God in Jesus.

Taking the above into consideration, let us reflect on Christian prayer in its widest sense, that is, as a personal response to the felt presence of God. The intensity of our search for the will of God through prayer as well as our deep awareness of God's loving presence within and around us will certainly embolden us to eagerly fulfill the will of God in our lives.

In our study, we shall focus on Prayer as obedience to the will of God, or, in more existential terms, as a joyful acceptance of the will of God and a total loving surrender to His ways and plans (cf. Is. 55: 8-9). After considering briefly the close link existing between obedience and prayer, we shall contemplate Jesus at prayer. Subsequently, we shall examine prayer in the Pauline perspective. While doing it, we shall attempt to discover the mind of St. Paul, through his own life example of personal prayer; and through prayer as a power sustaining his apostolate and ecclesial ministry.

1. Obedience and Prayer

Our modern culture with its dominant stress on individualism, subjectivism in matters of faith and personal freedom, often considers obedience a necessary evil or, at best, a functional necessity. Concurrently, on the other hand, an opposite trend shows people looking for authority, even of a dictator, as a bulwark against threatening powers in this world. Christian Obedience differs from both of these emphases.

Etymologically, the word obedience is derived from the Latin *ob-audire* which means "to hear". It denotes a willingness to hear others and to do their will. In the realm of faith, obedience refers to hearing God and obeying his will which may be represented in and by the will of other persons, in a variety of events. Obedient people manifest

a freely chosen and stable disposition to submit their wills to others. The right motivation for this submission is none other than love for God. It being a consciously willed and free choice, every act of obedience moulds the character of the Christian believer to a sensitivity and docility to God's call in diverse circumstances.

An attitude of true obedience motivated by Christian charity can permeate our entire life and activity. It is through loving obedience that we open up to the fullness of our self-realization. Such realization lies not in freedom from others but in free choices exercised with and for others. In its fullest sense, obedience involves self-fulfillment and self-sacrifice. Paradoxically, we are most free when we are most in compliance with God's will.

How to discern the will of God? In one of his books, William A. Barry says that "paying attention to God is an exercise in discernment." This exercise is none other than prayer whereby we, in a mysterious way, encounter God who wants a personal relationship with each one of us. Our God-experience ('*Abba*' experience) is the foundational experience for a way of life which lets God become more and more the central relationship and the touchstone for all other relationships.

By prayer we can discern "what is the will of God" and obtain the endurance to do it (Rom. 12:2). Prayer is the school of obedience, where we humbly acknowledge that God alone is the Source of our life, and trustingly we rely solely on Him. Through prayer we give to God the prompt response of our obedience of faith (cf. Rom. 1:5; 16:26) as well as our response of love to the free promise of His salvation.

2. Jesus at Prayer, obedient to the will of His Father

The sacred author led by the Spirit already captures so well that irreplaceable and mysterious moment of the Incarnation of the Son of God, who, while entering this world, has said: "Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7, 9). The Letter to the Hebrews grounds the basis for prayer firmly in Jesus' own experience as a human being. In obedience he was tried just as we humans are tried; therefore he can mediate our needs. This makes him a unique and definitive

high priest. "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications... Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered..." (cf. Heb. 5:7-10; also 2:18; 4:14-16; 7:23-28; 10:19-22).

Jesus learns to pray in the words and rhythms of the prayer of his own Jewish people, in the synagogue at Nazareth and the Temple at Jerusalem. His filial prayer springs from His intimate union with His Father right at the tender age of twelve: "I must be in my Father's house" (Lk. 2:49).

Whenever Jesus prayed, it was always as trusting son of the Father whose will is the norm for all human existence and activity: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn. 4:34). During the two great prayer experiences of Jesus, namely, the Baptism (Mk. 1:9-11) and the Transfiguration (Mk. 9:2-8), Jesus is presented as experiencing his unique relationship with God. "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." These words express Jesus' divine Sonship and imply his appointed mission of the Suffering Servant (cf. Is. 42:1). At the Transfiguration, the heavenly voice of the Father confirms Jesus' messianic Sonship. The momentary revelation of Jesus' glory is made to the disciples to confirm them in their conviction of Jesus' Messiahship (8:29). The disciples must listen to him (9:7) and accept his teaching about his divinely ordained suffering destiny, the necessity of death and resurrection according to God's will (8:31).

To understand Jesus apart from the cross dimension of his life is to misunderstand him. It is in this obedient listening to his word that our experience of Jesus is authenticated.

Jesus not only prays before the decisive moments of his mission, but also before those particular moments involving the mission of his apostles (cf. Lk. 6:12; 9:18-20; 22:41-44). In both instances, Jesus' prayer before the events of salvation that the Father has asked him to fulfill, is a humble and trusting commitment of his human will to the loving will of the Father.

Several truths can be learned from the Lord's Prayer recorded in two different versions: Mt. 6: 9-13 and Lk. 11:2-4. The most striking insight is the primacy of the presence of God in all prayer. The entire first part of the Lord's Prayer is meant to remind the believers that all reality exists for the glory and praise of God and that his fatherly will is the guide and goal of all human striving. The two-fold wish uttered before God "Hallowed be thy name" and "Thy Kingdom come" (in Lukan version) and the additional third wish "Thy will be done" (in Matthean version) - all of them make the beginning of the prayer emphatically God-centred. All the three petitions are concerned with God's bringing to fulfillment his final plan of salvation for human history.

Though it is a prayer in which the primary object of the wish is that God may manifest his holiness, it also includes the human response of dedication to that plan (Lev. 11:45) and of fulfillment of God's will.

A prayer that truly epitomizes the mind and heart of Jesus is that outpouring of his joy in the Holy Spirit (Mt. 11:25-27; Lk. 10:21-22). Jesus thanks the Father for disclosing the mysterious plans of His Providence to little ones and hiding them from the learned. His very exclamation "Yes, Father!" manifests the depth of his human heart and its loving adherence to the Father's "good pleasure" that is, to the mystery of His Father's will. Only the Son in whose hands everything has been handed over by God, knows the Father and He alone can give us this knowledge, that is, a unique experience of divine intimacy. This particular prayer is an expression of our Christian belief in the uniqueness of Jesus as revealer of the divine will and agent in the Father's plan of salvation.

The most lengthy prayer in the NT is that of Jesus to his Father in John's account of the Last Supper (Jn. 17:1-26). Called the "priestly prayer of Jesus" or the "prayer for unity", it embodies the essence of Jesus' prayer that consists in that the oneness of Jesus and God, His Father, may be shared by the disciples with him and with one another (Jn. 17:11b, 21). In this prayer, rooted in communion, seeking communion, Biblical prayer reaches its climax.

At last, when the hour had come for Jesus to fulfill the Father's plan of love, Jesus allows once again a glimpse of the boundless depth of his filial prayer, when he addresses God with that most endearing and intimate form of address (in Aramaic) '*Abba*' during His agony at Gethsemane: "*Abba*, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk. 14:36). It is the most critical moment of Jesus' life and Mark presents Jesus in all his humanity, in weakness and helplessness. Yet it is a prayer of complete surrender and obedient submission to the divine will. The warmth and the depth of the filial prayer extends throughout Jesus last words on the Cross that climaxed into His total and final loving surrender: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Lk 23:46).

Before Jesus returns to the Father in his glorified humanity, he teaches his disciples and all of us to turn to His Father in prayer with the intimacy and full confidence of children and "ask in his name" (Jn. 14:13; 25:16b). St. John in his first letter sums up the belief, knowledge, and confidence that we, believers, must have in Christ whereby we are assured that in whatever we ask according to the will of the Son of God we will be heard and answered (1 Jn 5:13-15).

Furthermore, what the Father gives us when our prayer is united with that of Jesus is the most precious gift of the Holy Spirit, "another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:16-17). This new dimension of prayer is displayed throughout Jesus' farewell discourse (cf. Jn. 14:23-26; 15:7,16; 16:13-15, 23-27). In the Holy Spirit, Christian prayer is a communion of love with the Father, not only through Christ but also in Him (Jn. 16:24).

The gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us enables us to pray with the same intimate "abba" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

3. Prayer: a Pauline Perspective

Of all the NT writers Paul is the one who provides the most and the best insights about the nature of prayer in the life of Christians and the need to pray "in Christ". Even though his letters contain few actual prayers, what comes to the fore, for instance, in his

“thanksgivings” narrated in liturgical fashion is Paul’s way of praying rather than his actual prayers. They also illustrate that Christian prayer is intimately linked to the mysterious plan of God’s salvation, namely, to the cross and the glorification of Jesus, which have made his Holy Spirit available to believers as their indwelling teacher of prayer.

Pauline spirituality that flows from his letters highlights his own understanding that his life and that of every Christian is life “in Christ.” For Paul our day-to-day experience of life in Christ centers on offering ourselves as living sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving for God’s overwhelming love for us in Christ - the love that nothing and nobody can ever separate us from (cf. Rom. 8:35-39). Where else could lie the quintessence of all our prayer?!

In the beginning of Paul’s life in Christ, his deep experience of the Risen Christ urged him to focus his preaching on the power of the resurrection. In the latter phase of his life and apostolate, his own experience of struggle, pain and failure in his ministry led him to concentrate on the mystery of Christ’s passion. Thus Paul’s mature growth in Christ was one of ever deeper and greater participation in the Paschal Mystery, of his loving trust even unto death so that the power of God made manifest in Jesus’ weakness might be manifest also in Paul’s weakness and in ours.

Paul, a man of prayer

After the above general consideration of Pauline spirituality and way of praying, let us delve into Paul’s own experience of personal prayer.

A man who, on his way to Damascus, led by his frenzy of persecuting Christians, has been encountered by the Risen Lord (Acts 9:1-9), now he has to make a complete turn about in his own plans and enter the city, submitting himself to altogether and radically new plans of the Lord, “for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15-16). Ananias is sent by the Lord Jesus to meet Saul at Damascus, a man who lost his sight. Once again here is a man who will be caught

up with a fever of preaching the Good News in all directions, traversing lands and sailing in the seas, but has to remain, anchored in solitude and prayer, obedient to the will of God, before he regains his sight and is filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:9. 17). A real protagonist of that dramatic and overwhelmingly transforming experience, Paul presents himself at Damascus as a man of prayer; for behold, he is praying (Acts 9:11c). The hour of amazing grace has struck for Saul during his three days' retreat! It is the saving moment (*Kairos*) in the history of salvation, in which Paul is appointed as a true servant of Christ, set apart as an Apostle of his Gospel, called to remain in perennial relationship with God (Rom.1:1). It is this prayer at Damascus that triggers off the vigorous movement of his zealous apostolate and intense pastoral ministry.

Thrice recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 9:1-19; 22:4-16; 26:9-18) this momentous event is being interpreted by the Apostle himself: "because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (*katelemphten*) (Phil. 3:12). The Greek verb underlines the fact that Paul is permanently engaged in the discovery or realization of his new and radical orientation towards Jesus Christ. Similarly, in Gal. 1:15 we have another appropriate expression that designates the special plan of God over Paul's life and mission: "... he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace..." Thus Paul's vocation as the preacher of the Gospel is placed in the line of the OT Prophets who are chosen by God, called, consecrated and commissioned (cf. Jer. 1:5; Is 49:1).

In 1 Cor 15:8 Paul's confession: "Last of all... He appeared also to me" (*ofte*) is redolent of Moses' vision of God. (Ex. 3:16) at Mount Horeb. By means of hearing and sight, both Moses and Paul are given decisive messages to be conveyed by them to the people of God.

Finally, Paul's self-awareness expressed in Gal. 1:12.16: "For I did not receive it (the gospel) from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ, is another effort to deeply understand his own privileged vocation and mission - an irruption of a totally new world of God in his life that came about through his personal encounter with the glorious Christ on the road to Damascus...

Personal Prayer of Paul at the root of his ministry

In Acts 22:17 we read: "... when I was praying in the Temple, I fell into a trance". It is the only text where Paul speaks of himself being at prayer.

With his kerygmatic preaching Paul bears witness to the Lord, in the Temple where frequently he goes to spend time in very personal and intimate prayer.

In this vision of the Temple, the new mission to go and proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles is entrusted to him directly by the Lord. Significantly in Acts 13:2 it is the Holy Spirit of the Risen Lord who chooses and sets apart Paul together with Barnabas for a definite mission.

So recalling the encounter event of Damascus (Acts 9:1-9) and the two above mentioned passages (Acts 22:17-21 and 13:2), we have three singular moments marked by prayer within the community of faith.

From a fierce persecutor of the followers of the Way, Paul has become the fervent missionary of Christ (Acts 22:19-20). In the environment of solitude and prayer Paul has discerned God's mysterious plan and found the real source of His strength and courage: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Another particular instance is when Paul and Barnabas entered together into the Jewish synagogue at Iconium (14:1-3). They preached with such a great success that many Jews and Greeks believed. There were, however, some unbelieving Jews that stirred up the Gentiles against the brethren. Despite this instigation and opposition Paul and Barnabas continued to proclaim boldly, trusting in the Lord (*parresia*) who bore witness to their preaching of the mystery of salvation (*charis*), granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands (14:3; cf. 15:4b). Paul obtains this grace (*charis*) of God through the prayer of the community that sustains him (cfr. Acts 4:29-31. 15: 11; 20, 24-32). Acts 26 provides one more setting where the triumph of prayer is seen. Paul makes his defence before the King Agrippa: "And now

I stand here on trial for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day" (26:7b). After recalling his appeal for conversion of heart on the part of all, Jews and Gentiles, Paul ends his apology with a fervent prayer that all those who have not still known Christ, may come to hope in Him, the Risen and glorious Lord, our Saviour, and become Christian like him (26:19-23.29).

During his sojourn at Rome it is said of Paul that he after rendering thanks to God, took courage (cf. Acts 28:15.31; see also Acts 23:11; 2 Cor. 5:6-7). It is his personal prayer that spurs Paul on to pick up courage in the face of adversities and trials.

Prayer in Gethsemane (Mt 26:36-46): A Paradigm

Cyriac Padapurackal

The prayer of Jesus at Gethsemane is a popular text. It is a model of praxis because it beautifully combines the relationship of Jesus to the Father and to the disciples. It is then, a model of prayer and life for the modern believers too especially in the context of suffering and persecutions.

Introduction

The Gethsemane episode narrated in Mt 26:36-46 is a unique event in the life of Jesus and stands as an immediate prelude to his passion and death. This prayer is also called "the agony in the garden". The same event has parallels also in Mark and Luke, Mark being the source of Matthew and Luke more briefly but dramatically with many changes. One of the main characteristics of this passage is that it is developed entirely by the speech and action of Jesus. It is a monologue without any response.

Here we analyse and interpret the text which is essentially prayer to realize its inner meaning and message and the invitation to renew convictions and mend the ways of life. After a syntactic analysis we shall move to the semantic level and finally to a pragmatic analysis. Thus we shall show how this text of prayer is essentially a text of action and praxis.

1. Syntactic Analysis

1.1. Delimitations

Matthew 26:36-46 is a narration of a unique event in the life of Jesus. It functions as a link between his 'active' life that culminates in the Passover feast and his 'passive' life that is characterised by his passion and death. To be more precise, it is an interim link between the

passover meal followed by a short dialogue with the disciples and the notorious betrayal of Jesus by Judas which led to the arrest of Jesus. The above mentioned dialogue took place either in the house where the Passover was celebrated or on the way to Mount Olives. This dialogue ends with the presumptuous assertion of Peter followed by other disciples (v. 35).

V. 36 begins with *tote* (then), which is a favourite word for Matthew. It expresses a link as well as a separation. It links up with the following passage and the preceding one and at the same time it denotes the beginning of a new episode. Obviously, there is a lapse of time between the dialogue with the disciples (vv.30-35) and the movement to Gethsemane.

In the same way, v. 47 introduces a new event evidently different from the former pericope. This verse presents Judas and his followers and consequent betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Although in v. 46 Jesus is presented as preparing himself and the disciples for the coming event, it should be taken as the conclusion of the Gethsemane event.

Hence, it should be concluded that the Gethsemane event beginning with v. 36 introduced by *tote*, stands out as a unit or pericope by itself.

1.2. Comparison with parallel Texts

Mt. 26:36 has parallel texts in the Gospels of Mark and Luke and parallel references in John, letter to the Hebrews and in Mt's own Gospel.

1. 2.1. Text of Mark 14: 32-42

In Mt and Mk, the dialogue that preceded the Gethsemane event, is narrated in the same way but with some slight changes. In the Gethsemane event similarities are many and dissimilarities few, but the few dissimilarities are very significant. Many scholars are of opinion that Matthew follows Mark's tradition but with changes so as to suit his stream of thought¹. Few others ascribe two earlier sources, 'source-A' and 'source-B' - as Stanley would name them - which formed the earlier traditions of Mk and Mt respectively². The following is a brief comparison of two texts basing mainly on significant variations.

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1. Cfr. David Hill, *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, London: W.M.B. Erdmans, 1981, p. 341.
 2. For more detailed study, read: David M. Stanley. *Jesus in Gathsemane*, New York: Paulist Press, 1980, pp. 105-118.

Although, both texts have the same number of verses, i.e., eleven, the Matthean text is slightly longer than Markan text. Here, I restrict the comparison to certain important words and phrases, which Matthew is believed to have changed to pin-point his own message to the christian community to whom he wrote. This specific message of Matthew shall be dealt with in the next chapter where we handle the semantic analysis.

In the first verse itself (36) Mt has made a meaningful change by using *met auton* (with them). Where Mk gives “they went to Gethsemane” Mt writes Jesus “went with them”, In Mt 26:36b Jesus says “I go yonder and pray”, in Mk *apelton ekei* (go yonder) is absent. In v. 33 Mk mentions the names of Peter, John and James, but in v. 37, Mt mentions Peter’s name only and others as ‘sons of Zebedee’.

In v.37b, Mt adopted the verb *lupeistai* (distressed) in the place of Mk’s *ektambeistai* (greatly frightened). Another significant change Mt makes is the use of *met* (with) many times in Jesus’ relationship with the disciples (vv.36a, 38b, 40b) whereas Mk does not use that proposition in these contexts. Mk addresses God as ‘Father’ only once in this prayer, and that word is preceded by the Aramaic equivalent “Abba” (v. 36); while Mt’s Jesus addresses God as “My Father” (*pater mu*) on two occasions (39b, 42b). Mt clearly mentions three prayers of Jesus (vv. 39b, 42b, 44b) and first two prayers are given in direct speech. Mk gives explicit reference to two prayers (vv. 35b-36) and implicit mention of the third prayer (v. 41a). He gives only one prayer in direct speech. While a change and progress is seen from the first prayer to the second prayer of Jesus in Matthean text (vv. 39, 42) Mk gives no such progress - Jesus said the ‘same prayers’. (30)³.

In Mk, as Jesus returns to the disciples after the first prayer, he calls Peter as Simon and the following question is addressed to him alone in singular form in Greek (v. 37). In the same context Mt has Jesus addressing Peter as Peter and the following question is to all (in plural. v. 40b). At the second arrival of Jesus, the drowsy disciples were at a loss to give an explanation to Jesus as Mk puts it (40b) and Mt has nothing to say about it at all. In v. 41b, Mk adds a complicated word

3. Walter E. Bundy, *Jesus and First three Gospels*, Cambridge; Harward University Press, 1955, p. 410.

(phrase) *apekei* (it is enough) in Jesus' talk to disciples as he came the third time, which Mt conveniently omitted. For Mk the hour of betrayal 'has come' (41b), but for the first evangelist the hour is 'at hand' (*engiken*).

Finally, a remarkable thing to note is that Jesus of Mark uses first person pronoun only five times in this passage while Jesus uses the same eleven times in the Matthean text.

1. 2.2. *Text of Luke 22: 39-46*

Luke's text on Jesus' agony in the garden is comparatively very short comprising only eight verses; there are more dissimilarities compared to the texts of Mt and Mk. He does not mention the name of Gethsemane and Jesus does not take the disciples with him; Lk does not even mention the names of the three. Jesus moves away for prayer only once, but he gives the same admonition to disciples twice, in the beginning and at the end (v. 40,46). Luke seems to be sympathetic to the sleeping disciples since he justifies their position as he sees them 'sleeping for sorrow' (v.45b). There is no announcement of the coming of the betrayer as Mt and Mk have it; Judas and party appear suddenly.

One striking thing to note is that v.43 and 44 mention two events which no other evangelist refers to. They are the appearance of an angel from heaven to strengthen Jesus and 'his sweat becoming like great drops of blood flowing down upon the ground'⁴. According to Walter and Bundy the text of Luke gives more plausible account than those of Matthew and Mark⁵.

1. 2.3. *Text of John 12:27*

There is no reference to the scene of Gethsemane in the Gospel of John, except a single verse, 12:27, which gives some allusion to Jesus agony, prayer to Father to save him from 'this hour' and his willingness to accept what is in store for him. But according to John this occurred a few days before the passion. After the last supper Jesus made a long discourse to the disciples, which, of course, reflected his troubled mind

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4. Lk. 22:43, 44 is omitted by R.S.V. but its footnote gives them with a note "other ancient authorities add vv. 43 and 44". The Greek N.T. edited by Kurt Aland and others (third Ed. 1983) gives these verses in brackets with footnote.
 5. Cfr W.E. Bundy (n. 3 above) p. 411.

“and he went forth with his disciples across the ‘Kedron Valley’ where there was garden, which he and his disciples entered” (18:1) and there he met his betrayer.

1.2.4. Letter to the Hebrews 5:7-10

Heb 5:7-10 seems to have a striking affiliation to Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane. Many modern scholars regard this passage as an interpolated adaptation of an early Gethsemane - tradition other than Source-A and Source-B as mentioned above⁶.

1.2.5. Lord’s Prayer Mt 6:9-13

There are many striking similarities with the Lord’s prayer as we compare it with the prayer of agony, The latter seems to be the realisation of the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples (Mt 6:9-13). He puts it into practice in his actual life-situation. The following table brings to light the parallelism.

Lord’s Prayer (6:9-13)	Prayer in Gethsemane
v. 9 Our Father	Vv. 39b & 42a My Father
v. 10 Thy will be done	v. 42b Thy will be done
v 13a Lead us not into temptation	v. 41a that you may not enter into temptation

1.3. Structural Analysis

A deep analysis of the text would show a clear structure characterised by a progressive movement to a climax in Jesus’ unique experience and gradual recuperation which prepares him to face the betrayal and passion with a firm mind. The growing distress of Jesus leads him to the Father in solitude. His fellowship with the disciples brings him down to their company. This movement of fellowship enables him to accept the will of God with full heart and soul. After the surrender to the unchangeable plan of salvation, he is calm and resigned and accepts the trial and crucifixion with a serene mind.

1.3.1. Structural Division

The whole passage brings to the forefront sense of dynamism from

6. For detailed study refer: D. Hill (n. 1 above).

the part of Jesus and a lethargic indifference from the part of the disciples. There are fifty six verbs used in this passage. Among these, seventeen verbs – most of them are different forms of Greek verb *erkomai* (I come) – refer to actual movement. There are many narrative sentences as well as ten imperative clauses. Taking these and other factors the whole text could be divided into eight units. Each unit could be labelled as a function of Jesus. All units have the following elements in common.

- 'Narration' sentence
- A clause or phrase showing 'movement'
- 'Exhortation or appeal' of Jesus using imperative or subjunctive mood
- 'Description or explanation' regarding the exhortation
- 'Direct speech' of Jesus.

The following is the division:

- i. Editorial introduction, 'tote erketai...proserkomai' v.36.
- ii. Growing distress and pain, 'Kai probation... met mou' vv. 37,38
- iii. Reaching up to the Father as the only source of Hope,
'Kai proelton...hos su; v. 39
- iv. Fellowship with the disciples, 'erketai... asthenes' vv, 40,41.
- v. Total surrender to Father's will, 'palin ek... telema su', v. 42.
- vi. Being confirmed in the act of surrender.
'kai elton ... eipon palin' vv.43,44.
- vii. Solidarity with human situation,
'tote erketai... kai anapeuste', v. 45a.
- viii. Preparation for facing the betrayal and trial,
'idou engiken... paradidus me', v.45a, 46

1.3.2. Structural Scheme

As one goes deep into the text through the structure and progression of ideas he comes across a right-ward inclined pyramidal shape of the whole narration. The whole text points to a climax in v. 42, "Thy will be done". Jesus surrenders totally to the will of the Father for the salvation

of humans, whom the disciples represent. The pyramidal schema given below helps us to understand this idea better. V. 36 being editor's introduction, is not included in the schema.

<u>vv.37,38</u>	'kai paralabon...'
<u>v.39</u>	'kai proelton...'
	<u>vv.40,41</u> 'kai ergetai...'
	<u>v.42</u> 'palin ek...'
	<u>vv. 43, 44.</u> 'kai elton palin...'
<u>v. 45 a</u>	'tote ergetai...'
<u>vv. 45b, 46</u>	'idou engeken...'

The above schema explains how from v.37 Jesus is subject to increasing tension and stress and how it reaches the climax at v.42. Then with the surrender to the Father, the tension is released and Jesus gets back to himself and reaches a serene, steadfast, and firm attitude of mind, totally prepared for the betrayal and trial.

1.3.3. *Structural parallelism*

The main character in the Gethsemane scene is Jesus; Father and disciples are silent characters. The whole pericope can be summarised as an interaction of the suffering Jesus with the Father and the disciples. This vertical and horizontal fellowship becomes clearer as we analyse the structural parallelism within this passage. The following table gives the parallel statements:

v. 36	==	v.46
v. 37	==	v.44
vv. 38 & 41	==	v.45
v. 40	==	v.43
v. 39	==	v.42

By a general observation, any reader can follow the parallelism between the first and the second group of the above verses in the form of contrasts and similarities of ideas and themes. Hence I do not elaborate on it; also because it would mean a few more pages which would go beyond the scope of this short paper.

2. Semantic Analysis

The semantic analysis of each unit of the Gethsemane text of Matthew will bring to lime-light the message of this pericope. It will also

help the reader to grasp more about the various elements discussed in the previous chapter.

2.1. Editorial Introduction v. 36

V. 36 serves as the immediate preparation for his agony. Jesus had already introduced the theme of his passion and he was preparing the disciples for this shocking experience even two days before the passion (Mt 26:1, 21, 29, 31, 34).

2.1.1. *Tote (then)*

The first word 'tote' is a favourite word for Matthew as we have already seen. He uses it as a link between two pericopes or discourses. As Stanley points out, the use of this word may be the author's technique to draw the attention of the reader to a significant saying or action of Jesus⁷.

2.1.2. '*Met auton*'

Mt 26:30 refers to the movement of Jesus and his disciples from the venue of the last supper to Mount Olives. After reaching there, Jesus 'went with them' (*met auton*) to Gethsemane. This '*met auton*' is Mt's addition. For, Mk simply puts: 'they went' (14:32). This phrase is a dear one for Matthew and it throws light on his favourite theme of 'God with us'. He introduces this theme in the first chapter of his Gospel by proposing the name of the to-be-born Christ as 'Emmanuel' – God with us (1:23). Jesus' fellowship with disciples is a fascinating idea for Matthew, which he introduces time and again through out the Gospel. In this chapter itself he uses *met* (with) eight times related to Jesus-disciples relationship (vv.18, 20, 23, 29, 36, 38, 40, 51). As Brown points out, this may have reference to the 'covenant formula' of the Old Testament 'I shall be your God and You shall be my people'⁸. For Mt the presence of Jesus is something promised by Jesus himself (18:20, 28:20). This use of 'with them' shows both the centrality of Jesus and his fellowship with his disciples⁹.

7. Ibid., p. 171.

8. Cfr. Raymond E. Brown, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1990, p. 670.

9. Cfr. John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew, Christ-Church-Morality* in the first Gospel, New York: Paulist Press, p. 185.

2.1.3. *Gethsemane*

Gethsemane literally means 'oil-press'; it is the transliteration of the Aramaic words gath-shamani (n). Oil press is usually found in olive orchard. Gethsemane was situated at the foot of the western slop of Olivet facing the temple¹⁰. John 18:1 speaks of Jesus moving to a 'garden' across the 'Kedron valley' without mentioning the name of the garden; and in v. 2 he remarks that it was a usual custom of Jesus to go to that place with his disciples. For Lk 'Mount of Olives' was the place of Jesus' agony. It is interesting to note that in 26:3, Mt quotes Zach 13:7 and the same prophet speaks of 'Mount of Olives, where the Lord takes his stand in the eschatological battle, where he gains the victory over his people's enemies' (14:4).

2.1.4. *Kathisate autou (sit here)*

As the little group reached Gethsemane, Jesus asked the disciples "sit here, while I go yonder and pray". Here Mt makes two small but significant changes as compared to Mk. For 'here' Mk uses *hode* while Mt uses *autou*¹¹ and he adds *apelton ekei* (go yonder). Some exgetes of this text believe that, while Mt made this change, he had in mind the celebrated story of Abraham's sacrifice. When nearing the place of sacrifice Abraham told the young servants "stay here (in Septuagint - *kathisate autou*) with the donkey, the lad and I will go yonder and worship" (Gen 22:5). Here Mt compares Jesus with Issac whom Abraham loved (Gen 22:2). 'The loving and obedient son and the loving Father' – this is brought to the notice of the reader.

2.2. Growing Distress and Sorrow v. 37, 38

It is evident from the words and deeds of Jesus, as expressed by evangelists, that he was fully aware of his impending passion and death and he was becoming more and more sensitive and emotional as his end

10. Cfr. Alexander Joanes, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965, p. 297.

11. The word *autou* is most widely used as masculine or neuter genitive singular of the pronoun *autous* (he) or *auto* (it). But very rarely it is used as adverb also pointing to a place. It can mean either 'here' or 'there'. In N.T. it is used four times. In Acts 15:34, 18:19, 21:24 *autou* is used as adverb meaning there but in Mt 26:36, it is used as adverb meaning 'here'. In LXX, Gen. 22:25 the same word is used in the above meaning (here).

was nearing. But the outpouring of his emotions began as he moved a little along with 'Peter and the sons of Zebedee' leaving behind the rest of the apostles. Jesus began to be 'sorrowful and troubled' and he confessed to the three that he was 'full of sorrow even to death'. He asked them to remain there and watch with him (v. 38). Here certain important usages could be analysed.

2.2.1. *'Ton Petron... Zebedaion'*

No scholar has convincingly shown why Jesus took with him only the three disciples and why these three were selected. But many have proposed some or the other of the following reasons.

- They were the witnesses of Jesus' transfiguration (Mt 9:28)
- They were the witnesses of raising to life of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:37)
- They along with Andrew heard the prediction of the destruction of the temple (Mk 13: 3f).
- Peter is Jesus' close associate and the leader of the disciples (Mt 16: 17-19)
- John and James had promised Jesus that they would be able to drink the cup which Jesus was to drink (Mt 20:22, 23).

They were better prepared to withstand the shock of their master's great sorrow¹².

Mark mentions the names of John and James, while Mt avoids it by calling them as 'sons of Zebedee'. Stanley traces the reason for this; Mt has a natural reluctance to spell out the names of the disciples except that of Peter; but at the same time he has a predilection for the Zebedee family (4:21, 10:12, 20:20). He alone mentions the presence of the mother of the sons of Zebedee in Calvary (27:56). Mt may have made this change only to link this incident with the earlier reference about the saying about the cup in 20: 22¹³.

2.2.2. *'Lupeistai kai...tanaton'*

In the place of *ekthambeistai* (greatly frightened) in Mk 14:33b Mt adopted the word *lupeistai* (be sorrowful). Mt may have effected this

12. Kurt Aland, (Ed.) *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1987, p. 830.

13. Cfr. D.M. Stanley (n. 2 above) p. 175.

change firstly to weaken the force of the second verb *admonein* (troubled) so as to suit Matthew's Jesus, who is the son of the loving Father and who accepts fully his will even with sorrow. Secondly, to bring Jesus' state of mind to that of disciples as they heard Jesus' prediction about his passion and death (17:23, 26:22). Thirdly, to make it parallel to Jesus' own words that followed soon, "My soul is sorrowful even to death"; here Mk also uses the same word *perilupos* (14:34a).

The *psukee* (soul) in the above statement of Jesus is to be differentiated from the *pneuma* (spirit) in v. 41. *Psukee* is used in N.T. in three shades of meaning; firstly, for the natural physical life (Acts 20:10, 27:22); secondly, for the whole person (Mt 11:29), thirdly, for the place of feeling and emotions in the human beings (Acts 14:2, 15:24, Mt 14:34). The last would be the appropriate sense of *psukee* in the present context.¹⁴

What is the real cause of deep sorrowful experience of Jesus? Authors have proposed various causes for his sorrow as given below:

- His physical sufferings and crucifixion
- Betrayal of Judas
- Desertion of his close associates, the disciples
- Peter's denial
- His death being futile for many
- The feeling of abandonment by Father (Mt 27:46).

Jesus' words "my soul.... death" seems to have a reference to Psalm 42:5a.¹⁵

2.2.3 *Gregoreite met emou'*

The instruction of the suffering Jesus to the privileged three has very salutary implications and we get its full meaning when we link it with Jesus' admonition to disciples narrated in v. 41.

Gregoreite is the imperative plural form of Greek *Gregoreo* the root meaning of which is 'I keep awake'. Mt 24:43; Mk 13:34; Mk 12:17

14. Gerard Friedrich (Ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IX, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974, pp. 604-608.

15. Cfr. George T. Montague, *Companion of God - A cross-cultural Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990, p. 295.

etc., use this word in this sense; but it has a figurative meaning 'be on the alert' or 'be watchful' (Mt 24:42; 25:13; Mk 13:35, 37).¹⁶ What is its meaning here, literal or figurative? There are arguments for both. Since Jesus asks them to watch with him, it directly implies keeping awake. In v. 40b, he scolds them for their sleep and their failure in keeping awake for *mian horan* (one hour) at least, it should be taken in the literal sense. But in v. 41, the same word is used in connection with prayer and temptation, here the figurative meaning is more appropriate. Besides, alertness or watchfulness demanded in Mt 24:42 and 25:13 supports the second meaning. Hence, one may conclude that either this word has the meaning of 'keeping awake' in the first two places and 'watchfulness' in the third place or that it has a direct meaning of keeping awake and an indirect or alluded sense of watchfulness in all contexts.

The addition of *met emou* (with me) again recalls Mt's stress on Jesus' deep desire to be one with his disciples¹⁷. It may also point out his desire for support and sympathy. Anyhow, it is an exhortation to the disciples to follow his example in turning to Father in prayer in moments of stress and trial so that one may emerge victorious like Jesus¹⁸.

2.3. Reaching upto Father as the only Source of Help v. 39

Jesus' deep anguish leads him to his only solace, the Father. He reaches up to Father in solitude leaving, for the time being, even the three disciples. He fell "on his face and prayed". This posture of prayer expresses Jesus' deep reverence and respect for Father. It is a typical Jewish posture of prostration. The disciples did the same prostration at the transfiguration of Jesus (Mt 17:6). In Mk's text, Jesus falls 'on the ground' (14:35). Matthew did not want to depict Jesus as collapsing on the ground¹⁹.

Jesus' prayer is very significant and historically unique. Addressing God as "my Father" he beseeched, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt". By changing

16. Cfr. Walter Bauers, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, U.S.A.: University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 167.

17. Cfr. J.P. Meier (n.9 above) p. 186.

18. Cfr. G.T. Montague (n. 15 above) p. 295.

19. Cfr. Stanley (n. 2 above) p. 176.

Mk's "Abba, Father" in to "My Father" Matthew succeeded in relating this prayer to the Lord's Prayer of Mt 6:9-13. The elements of this prayer will be reflected through out the Gethsemane scene²⁰.

Jesus' prayer is hypothetical - "if it be possible". This clause has created exegetical problem for many. Stanley explains "That a real possibility of escape remains open to Jesus during the passion, however, can be gauged by his claim at the moment of his arrest (Mt 26:53)".²¹ At the same time Mt 26:54 shows how Jesus was preoccupied with his mission to fulfil the scriptures. Besides Jesus had many a time foretold his passion and death.

What does the poterion (cup) mean to Jesus? It literally means drinking vessel or cup. In O.T. it is used in a figurative sense; often it referred to the suffering allowed or sent by God. It is also used rarely to mean good or bad fortune of human beings (Is 51:17-22, Jr 13:13, Ps 75:9, 16:5, 23:5). In N.T. this word is used thirty three times: Mt alone six times. In Mt 20:22, 23 it is used with reference to the passion of Jesus. Mk 10:38, 39, 14:36, Lk 22:42, Jn 18:11 have this word to mean the suffering and the death of Jesus.

The same figurative meaning is to be taken for this word 'cup' in vv. 39 and 42. While Mk's Jesus prays for the 'hour' to be removed (14:35) Mt introduces the 'cup', probably to relate it to the prophecy of Jesus narrated in Mt 20:22.

Jesus' prayer to 'let the cup pass' from him, *prima facie* may show that his obedience and loyalty is at stake, but, as David Hill observes, these words may imply that he was atleast tempted to think of a possibility that the building up of the kingdom of God could be realised without undergoing the preliminary suffering.²²

Alexander Jones tries to solve this problem by attributing two wills, an instinctive will and a deliberative will, to Jesus. Our Lord's instinctive will shrank from suffering and death considered in themselves; his deliberative will embraced them for the sake of what they were to bring - the redemption of humanity in the way God willed it.²³

20. Cfr. J.P. Meier, (n. 9 above), p. 187.

21. D.M. Stanley, (n. 2 above), p. 177.

22. Cfr. D. Hill, (n.1 above) pp. 341-342.

23. Cfr. A Jones (n. 10 above) p. 297

As we move to the second part of the prayer, *ouk hos ego telo al hos su* (not as I will but as thou wilt), we are inclined to see an intrinsic contradiction between the will of Jesus and the salvific plan of God. The betrayal, passion and crucifixion of Jesus had an excruciating reaction on Jesus that it challenged his relationship with the Father to the extent of losing the identity of his will with that of the Father; the Father-son relationship would, then, be shattered. The very same Father, whose love and trustworthiness Jesus had been proclaiming, is actually striking him. It was a heart-breaking moment for Jesus, a moment when he felt that he was abandoned and separated by Father. Real scandle and temptation! But he overcame the test and remained steadfast in perfect relationship by submitting to the will of the Father. He continued to address him 'my Father'. This attitude culminated in Jesus' words 'Thy will be done (26:42b)²⁴.

The author of Hebrews alludes to this prayer of Jesus, when he writes, "In the days of his flesh... death" and he adds "and he was heard for his godly fear" (5:7). How Jesus was heard? Montague writes, "not by removing the cup but by going through it, he was raised from the dead"²⁵. It is through death, not through escaping from suffering Jesus wins victory.

These words of Jesus' prayer revivates one part of the Lord's prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10).

2.4 Fellowship with Disciples vv. 40, 41

Jesus' communion and fellowship with Father expressed in the form of prayer from the depth of his heart was followed by his fellowship with his own beloved disciples. "He came to his disciples" but alas, "he found them sleeping" (v. 40).

To sleep is a law of physical nature of man or woman: but the peculiar situation of the privileged three, the master's command, being close to an agonising Lord, etc., make the sleep of the disciples a serious inadvertence. They betray their complete lack of awareness of the gravity of the situation of Jesus and theirs²⁶. They did not share the tragedy of

24. Cfr. Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, p. 368.

25. G.T. Montague, (n. 15 above), p. 296.

26. Ibid., p. 295.

Jesus. Their self-confidence (26:34, 35) blinded their mind against the forthcoming scandals and tests. They were behaving like the servants who did not keep awake when the master or the thief came (24:42, 44)²⁷. They were like the foolish virgins, unprepared for the eschatological crisis when it came (Mt 25:1-13).

From the context we have to assume that they were not in deep sleep. It may be that they were dozing and they were dimly aware of the tragic situation; otherwise, how did they know about Jesus' prayer and agony? The heavy pascal meal and many cups of wine made their eyes heavy. Besides as Lk remarks they were laden with sorrow (22:45b).

The reaction of Jesus in front of the sleeping disciples was a rebuke and salutary warning. "He said to Peter, 'So you could not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak'".

Now, regarding the mode of speaking we see a difference in Mark. In Mt, although Peter is addressed, the rebuke (v.40) and the admonition (v. 41) are to all, because the Greek verb used (*iskusate*) is in plural form; where as in Mk, Jesus addresses Peter as Simon and the following scolding is in singular (*iskusas*), i.e., to Peter alone (v. 37), but the admonition is to all (v. 38). Meier observes an ecclesiological thrust of Matthew in this redaction. Peter's role as leader and representative is a constant concern and interest of Mt. He represents the disciples who failed to watch and pray in the face of eschatological trial. "Peter in the passion narrative shows the ugly underside of the church leadership" says Meier²⁸.

Jesus' salutary warning "watch....temptation" is the master's patrimony to the church leadership. Disciples are reminded to watch and pray. As we have seen already, 'watch' does not mean here mere keeping awake, but it has an eschatological significance. The word *eiseltete* (enter into) points to this allusion. Mt uses the same many a time consistently as a special term to signify the entering of the kingdom of heaven (5:20, 7:21, 18:3, 19:23, 24, 22:12, 23:13, 25:10, 21, 23). Stanley's remark on this point is worth nothing. "For the evangelist 'entering into testing' represents the antithesis of eschatological

27. Ibid.

28. J.P. Meier, (n.9 above) p. 187.

salvation, and hence, testing is a real threat for the failure of the disciples. In this sense testing does not involve Jesus"²⁹. It has a clear allusion to the Lord's prayer "lead us not into temptation". This parallelism explains the Matthean change of the Markan word *eltete* (encounter) into *eiseltete*.

An analysis of the word *peirasmos* (temptation) shall help us to comprehend the true sense of the phrase³⁰. In the biblical context, especially in LXX, *peiraso* and *peirasmō* are used frequently but often in religious sense, as God tempting the human (Gen 22:1) or as the human tempting God (Ex 17:2). In N.T. *peirasmos* is very seldom used in secular sense, and most often used in the religious sense but only related to human beings. St. Peter describes suffering for the sake of faith as temptations of christians (I Pt 1:6) but most often the temptation stands for the moral persuasion to do evil or abandon faith. In this sense James 1:13, 14 forbids to call God as tempter; but he affirms that one's own desire is the root cause of temptation. The Evangelists combines these two views and adds an eschatological perspective. For them, temptation is the state of mind persuaded to do evil or to lose faith due to pressure of human desires of flesh or the tribulations and afflictions which a christian encounters in the kingdom of heaven (Lk 8:13). Synoptics explain how Jesus also was subject to such temptations (Mt 4:1-11, Mk 1:12, 13, Lk 4:1-3), where satan, the personification of evil, is the agent of temptation. The eschatological significance of temptation and its relation to watchfulness and prayer are mentioned in various other N.T. passages also. A parallel warning can be found in I Pt 5:8.

The need for watchfulness and prayer is explained by Jesus. The nature of the human demands it because "his *pneuma* (spirit) is willing but the *sarks* (flesh) is weak". Bauers gives various allied meanings of the word *pneuma* in N.T. The most appropriate in this context seems to be that 'spirit' may be taken as part of human personality in contrast with flesh (Col 2:5, II Cor 7:1)³¹. Some scholars view this contrast

29. D.M. Stanley, (n.2 above) p. 179.

30. *Peirasmos* is derived from the root word '*per*' and its related verb *peraw* have various shades of meaning: i, to attempt or to strive, ii, to put to test, iii, to try some one or test something. Its derivative forms are; i, *peiraso* (to make an attempt, try out) ii, *peira* (test, attempt, experience) iii, *peirasmos* (experiment mainly medical).

31. Cfr. W. Bauer, (n. 16 above) p. 674-678.

between spirit and flesh as a Pauline theme; but David Hill denies it. He says that the spirit mentioned here is not the divine spirit imparted to the human. The distinction is between human person's physical weakness and noble desires of his will".³²

2.5 Total Surrender to the Will of the Father v. 42

Jesus' increasing sorrow and distress, least softened by his associates, but only enhanced by their indifference and slothfulness, returns to Father in solitude. Here, he prays more intensely, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done". This prayer expresses the climax of his tension and sorrow, which leads him to surrender himself totally to Father's design and to say, "geneteto to *the lama* su" (thy will be done). It is an act of extreme self surrender. By this, Jesus has made up his mind and he is settled. He is relaxed and the struggle is being vanished. He realised the impossibility of what he had asked for - the hypothetical request (v.39). Meier comments on this, "The essence of the prayer of the obedient son is that the Father accomplishes his saving will in the eschatological crisis; no matter what the cost of suffering be for his sons"³³. 'Thy will be done' is a direct quotation from the Lord's Prayer (6:10). Jesus' life turns to be the practical application of what he taught the disciples. This is the perfect form of prayer - the most sublime attitude of mind behind any form of prayer of petition.

2.6 Being Confirmed in the Act of Self-surrender vv. 43, 44

Jesus' agony gave way to repose and settled mind as a result of his total commitment to God's will. He comes again to his beloved ones, probably, to share his new experience. But he "found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy". For Lk their eyes were heavy due to sorrow (22:45). There is no such sympathetic remark in Mt and Mk, but the latter has another clause, "and they did not know what to answer him". Mt does not mention any question or remarks as uttered by Jesus on this occasion. Jesus left them quietly as if not to disturb.

32. D. Hill (n.1 above) pp. 341-342. According to Rabbinic Psychology, 'flesh and spirit' correspond to two tendencies of human person - the good and evil (cfr. R.E. Brown, n.8 above) p. 670). The contrast of flesh and spirit taken in the sense of man and Spirit of God, is quite common in the Bible, but in Mt 26: 41b, the evangelist seems to take the sense of physical body as flesh and the conscious self as the spirit. (cfr. D.M. Stanley, op.cit, p. 142).

33. J.P. Meier, (n.9 above) p. 188.

“So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words”. Here Mt does not spell out the prayer of Jesus, but only remarks that he was repeating the former prayer. This clearly shows that Jesus had nothing more to pray, but only to affirm and confirm what he had already said. The former prayer was the most perfect form of prayer. He wanted to repeat it to be more and more rooted in conviction.

2.7 Solidarity with Human Situation v. 45a

The last phase of Jesus' Gethsemane experience is described in v. 45a. With a determined and steadfast mind Jesus leaves the place of prayer with Father, and comes down to the disciples and he asks them “Now on, you sleep and take rest”. The original Greek version puts the reader in confusion. The Greek verbs *katheudete* and *anapeueste* can be both a statement (indicative second person plural) or a command (imperative) grammatically: The first in active present tense and the second in the middle form. With a question mark, it could be a question also. Since the original script had no punctuation mark, ‘*katheudete to loipon anapeueste*’ was translated by later authors in three different ways:³⁴

- i – ‘Now on you sleep and take rest’ (command)
- ii – ‘Are you still sleeping and taking rest’ (question)
- iii – ‘You are still sleeping and resting’ (ironical statement)

As we analyse the word in the middle ‘(to) *loipon*’ we will be inclined to assume the first of the above alternatives, i.e., as a command. As Walter and Bauer explains the root meaning of *loipos (on)* is ‘remaining’ (to) *loipon*’ is adverb, meaning ‘from now on, hence - forth etc. As adverb or even as adjective it has no significance relating to past. But it has always the significance of present related to future.³⁵ Hence the words of Jesus taken as a command to the weak and tired disciples, to sleep and take rest, is more becoming to the context. Since Jesus has made up his mind, and he is at ease; his compassion for his disciples, whose eyes were heavy, prompted him to let them sleep and take rest for the remaining period. Jesus’ solidarity with and understanding of the human situation is brought to lime light by the Evangelist.

34. Cfr. Kurt Aland (ed.) *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd Ed. p. 104.

35. W. Bauers, (n.16 above) p. 479-480.

2.8 Preparation for facing the betrayal and trial vv. 45b, 46

As Jesus just finished asking them to sleep and rest, he probably realised that Judas with his followers were approaching. Hence, Jesus said, "Behold the hour is at hand and the son of man is betrayed into the hands of the sinners", and he asked them "Rise, let us go see, my betrayer is at hand".

Idou (behold) is a favourite word of Matthew. This is used to give more force to the words that follow.

What is the significance of *hora* (hour) in Jesus' speech? Bauers gives various shades of meaning of *hora* in N.T. according to the context it is used.

i – Time of Day Mk 11:11, Mt 14:15

ii - A short period of time (Mt 20:12, 26:40) or a moment of time that has just passed Mt 15:25

iii – The time something took place or will take place Mt 8:13.³⁶

Mt uses this word twenty two times in his Gospel. In 24:36, 42, 44,50 and 25:13, he uses this word in an eschatological context related to the coming of the son of Man. The meaning of the word 'hour' in v.45, does not seem to assume none of the above categories of meaning. As the 'hour' is closely connected to the 'handing over to the sinners' and Judas' betrayal, it should signify the moment when God hands over the son to the hands of the Romans. Jesus had already declared to the disciples that 'the Son of Man will be handed over for crucifixion (26:12). He reminds them of that and also its nearness.

Engiken (is at hand) is used by Mt early in 3:2, 4:17, 10:17, to point out the coming of the kingdom of God and of the harvest in 21:34. The 'hour at hand' alludes to the nearness of the decisive moment in Jesus' life.

The phrase *vios toe anthropon* (Son of Man) is a disputed one. In Semantic thinking it denotes a human individual. Majority of the scholars admit that this is a self-designated name of Jesus; but a few others do not admit it. According to Stanley, it is difficult to imagine that Jesus uses this term for himself since this term had an apocalyptic connotation from the time of Daniel. It might probably be that Jesus might have

36. Ibid

used it figuratively to describe the 'son of man' to come as vindicator of his own preaching – as a symbol of God's judgement at apocalyptic times. Realising this mystery in the Risen Christ, the early christians may have attributed this term to historical Jesus³⁷.

Paradidotai (handed over) in theological passive use shows that the Father is the real initiator of Jesus' passion and death. It is he who hands over his son to the Romans, to be tried and crucified.

Jesus is handed over to *amartalon* (sinners); who are they? In reality he was arrested and crucified by the Romans. The term 'sinner' reminds us that Jesus' passion was exclusively for the remission of sins (26:28). Stanley finds a parallelism between v. 45b and v. 46b. Both clauses begin with 'Behold'. Both have the act of 'handing over first by Father and the second by Judas'. By introducing the parallelism the Evangelist wanted to show that, even through the act of Judas though treacherous, God carries through His saving design for the world.³⁸

3. Pragmatic Analysis

Uangelion literally means 'good news', a message for action in life. Matthew's Gospel was written as a message for the Matthean community, which by divine providence, has a universal application for all peoples of all times. The Gethsemane narrative has a clear message to inspire the life of the community. The following is a brief discussion about the pragmatic impulse of this passage. This is analysed from two perspectives: first as a message for the community and second as message for the church leaders.

3.1. A lesson of Man-God relationship

Man-God relationship is a basic concept of any religion. True man-God relationship was taught by Jesus and shown by him in his own life. It has three phases.

3.1.1. Total Reliance on God

It has always been the teaching of Jesus that God is our Father and we are His children. God's concern for human beings is unique and exceptional (6:25-34). All, therefore, have to seek God above all things.

37. Cfr. D.M. Stanley, (n.2 above) p. 141.

38. Ibid., pp. 182-185.

This reliance is expressed primarily by a fundamental option for and basic orientation to Him in all life-experiences – in life and death, success and failure, pain and pleasure, and in peace crisis (11:28-30). For this, a deep-rooted faith in the unfailing love and concern of the Father towards the children is a *sina qua non* - a living and tested faith even when he chastises us. This is what Jesus shows us in his experience in Gethsemane. Even when he was 'sorrowful even to death' he ultimately turned to God alone.

3.1.2. *Seeking with Confidence*

Prayer is the expression of reliance of man on God. Jesus taught us to ask, seek, and knock with faith and reward would follow (Mt 7:7-11) and to pray relentlessly (Lk 18:1). Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane teaches us that the reward for prayer is sure to come, but it is designed and shaped by God's master plan. The agenda of God's plan is often beyond what our limited vision can see. The limited good or the immediate reward which we aspire for is taken over and transformed into an ultimate good, which fits very well with God's master plan of restoration of all creation. This lesson is very magnificently manifested in the prayer. Jesus' "prayer and supplication with loud cries and tears... was heard for his godly fear" (Heb 5:7). How? by raising from the dead and restoration of all creation. Like Jesus' prayer ours too will be heard and rewarded with victory but not always in a way that will remove the impending cross.³⁹

3.1.3. *Total Self-surrender*

The climax and summit of Jesus' prayer was his self-surrender to God's will: 'Thy will be done'. This is what Jesus taught us in Lord's prayer. In our utter misery and pain we pray 'with loud cries and tears' but it should be open so as to be screened by the will of God. Christ has taught us "seek first the kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33). This basic openness is the fundamental attitude necessary for any petitionary prayer of a believer.

3.2. *Salutary warning for church leaders*

Jesus' command to the disciples to 'watch and pray....flesh is weak' is a precautionary warning to church leaders - those in authority. As

39. Cfr. G.T. Montague, (n. 15 above) pp. 296-297.

Meier puts it, "when persecution and martyrdom beset the church, the church leaders are those who are most gravely tempted to fall. In this trial they must hear the command of Jesus "watch and pray".⁴⁰

Conclusion

The Gethsemane event, as Matthew has narrated, is an instruction on christian prayer for the christian community. The Lord's prayer was the sublime prayer which Jesus taught in words and prayer in Gethsemane was the realization of that prayer in action. As Stanley says "The christian is schooled in the experience of the adopted sonship through the example of Jesus."⁴¹

More similarities and few but very significant dissimilarities with the Markan text led many authors to conclude that Matthew followed the Markan text but with some adopted changes. These changes betray Mt's themes and special concerns shadowed through out the text. Christology and Ecclesiology are the twin themes of this passage. His stress on the unique relationship of Jesus with the Father as the son of God and his emphasis on Jesus' fellowship with disciples characterised by 'with me' throw light on these two themes. In reality it is a moral exhortation for the christian community to whom Matthew was associated.

As we have seen, every word or phrase in this passage is pregnant with meaning and message which touch the core of heart forcing him to identify himself with Jesus in similar situations.

Kottayam

40. Cfr. J.P. Meier, (n.9 above).

41. Stanley (n. 2 above) p. 170.

Psalm 8:

Model of Prayer as Process of Integration

Augustine Mulloor

Psalms are models of prayer par excellence. They can be considered the actual life cries of a believer in the context of suffering, joy, blessing, sinfulness, despair and hope etc. Pss become expressions of orientation of life, disorientation and reorientation. Ps 8 is presented very briefly as a model of right integration of life in relation to God, universe and human beings. Prayer ought to make such an integration possible.

Psalm 8 is a psalm of praise. Verses 1 and 9 repeats the very purpose of the psalm namely praising God for the universe.

In the rest of the Psalm there are three characters: God, human beings and the universe. Human beings have the capacity to observe the phenomena of nature, introspect and find the right positioning of all the realities of the universe. Let us look at it from the angle of prayer.

The praying person has the very nature of an infant and babe with the capacity to recognize the creator God just above them.

The prayer leads to right self consciousness. The phenomena of the universe and the creator are in direct contact. The heavens are the work of his hands and the moon and the stars are established directly by God.

From there the praying person moves to introspection. The human beings have no right to be proud because they have been created little less than God. Even that is God's work. God created them and gave them glory and honour. God has given them the authority over creatures. They do not have authority but have given-authority as a gift.

It is very clear that in the psalm God is the main actor. This is true in relation to human beings or the phenomena of nature. God is the source of everything and of all human beings. Human beings have authority simply because it is given by God. All the phenomena of the universe are under human beings only in God. The result is the praise of God.

Prayer, therefore makes us realize the integral vision of the universe, God and human beings. Prayer integrates our life into one and inspires us to make the lives a praise... So prayer makes one understand the rightly balanced position of God being the centre and all others under him. This is how prayer becomes the process of integration.

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